



Behold We Live

A Novel
by Charles Dunscomb

Behold, We Live

Charles Dunscomb

In *The Bond and the Free* Charles Dunscomb told the story of a skeptic's conversion to Christianity. In *Behold, We Live* it is the conversion of a cynic, a man who gave lip service to the Christian Church while using it to serve his own ends. Or so he thought.

Cedonius was the head slave in a Christian household in Rome toward the end of the second century, a time when Christianity was still officially outlawed. He was a handsome, clever, arrogant man, unscrupulous in using his master's money and his connection with the Christian community for speculations through which he hoped to make enough profit to purchase his freedom.

When Myonides the Jew absconded with his money, Cedonius tried to escape to Africa, but was captured and sentenced to prison. After his release he sought revenge upon Myonides, only to find himself exposed as a Christian and sent to

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TO MY DAUGHTERS
VICTORIA AND CHARLOTTE

PART I

THE SUMMER of A.D. 187 was hotter than usual. The stones of Rome and the bricks of her tenement buildings became so hot during the afternoons that one could not comfortably put a hand upon them, and even at night they were still warm to the touch. Fountains were reduced to trickles and the pools at their feet to oily puddles. During the day people kept to the shadows, walking close to the walls with their heads down and their eyes half closed against the glare, stepping round the sleeping bodies of slaves and dogs. The dung of the animals in the streets dried within the hour; it was pulverized by the wheels of the traffic and blown up into the air in spirals by puffs of hot wind, there to mingle with the yellow dust, and to spread in biscuit-colored plumes against the blue sky before settling upon the sleepers and drifting into the houses through their latticed windows.

Hypatius, a fat man of about fifty, patted his red neck with a handkerchief, and turned from the window. For a moment he was the center of a golden nimbus as a fresh cloud of dust drifted in, outlining his round head with a

saint's halo. Cedonius bent his shoulders forward in an attitude fitting to a slave, lowering his eyes, and folding his hands in respect. When he was with Hypatius, he always tried to minimize his height, for it seemed tactless for a slave to be so much taller than his master that he was forced to look down on him in a physical reversal of their social relationship. As a matter of fact, Hypatius was not deceived. He knew that Cedonius despised him, and as he looked at him he thought again what a formidable creature this slave of his was. With the big muscular figure of a gladiator Cedonius was handsome in a way peculiar to the slums. He had the kind of contemptuous physical arrogance of the ill-bred, the insolent pride of an efficient organism of flesh and blood, muscle and bone, but with all this — and it made him dangerous — he had the tact and diplomacy of a palace favorite and the brain of a successful general. He was the kind of man for whom an Empress might develop a passion; the kind of cock of the dunghill who might rule the Empire from the security of the back stairs, until his mistress got tired of him. But although Hypatius disliked him, it had been a good day when he had bought him, and an even better day when he had put him in charge of his household. It was one of the advantages of being a Christian that you could expect a certain degree of honesty from your slaves, and one of the advantages of a Christian house that you could count on a certain degree of loyalty from its members. As Christianity was both illegal and greatly feared by most people, it had its dangers, but on the whole Hypatius looked back upon his baptism with the sober satisfaction which he reserved for the conclusion of successful business deals, even though he had

been baptized before he had become a freedman and, therefore, without realizing what benefits he would eventually derive from it. For Hypatius had done well. He had been clever enough to avoid an ostentatious success, and this he had done by interesting himself in a great many small things rather than building one large business, which would have attracted the hostility of powerful rivals. At the same time he had avoided the worst effects of the chronic inflation, from which the Empire was suffering, by keeping most of his wealth in the form of property or goods. But, recently, he had been very successful in the more exciting though less secure world of financial speculation, and this had been the work of Cedonius, who had shown a genius for such things. A slave was in a particularly good position to pick up information, for men talked over their meals, their slaves had ears, and information could always be bought. Moreover, Christian slaves, of whom there were many in this latter half of the second century, were only too willing to sell information to a fellow Christian, so that Cedonius had a great network of informers at his disposal who kept him not only abreast of but a step ahead of the market developments. Hypatius knew that Cedonius was making money for himself, and hoped to buy his freedom with it; but he had no intention of losing so valuable an asset. In a way it was rather a shame to keep such a man as Cedonius in slavery, but it would never do to lose him, so Hypatius was always raising the price of Cedonius' freedom; a procedure which he found easy to justify in a time of inflation.

"All right, Cedonius," Hypatius said, moving into the room away from the window and dabbing at his wet face

with the handkerchief as he walked. "Tell me when there are any developments. I want to be informed, you understand? None of your surprises this time! This tin business is uncertain. I don't like it. You may be right, but Festus isn't infallible, you know. Banks have been known to be wrong, like anyone else. Just tell Rufus to bring me some weak vinegar and water, as you go, will you? And pull those shutters across the window."

Cedonius closed the lattice shutters. The sun shone through them, its beams, like bars through the dusty air of the darkened room, casting a shining pattern onto the tiled floor. As he left the room, Cedonius smiled, for he had managed the interview skillfully, and Hypatius had guessed nothing. But if he was to be kept in ignorance, it was essential to hurry; for at any time he might ask questions that could not be answered, or order Cedonius to invest the money that was already invested with Myonides. Cedonius did not allow himself to think of the consequences of failure. If the idea entered his head at all, he dismissed it with a faint frown of irritation and distaste, for things did not fail for Cedonius. He was not as other slaves were. He knew his own talents and his own abilities, and he relied upon them. This recent speculation with Myonides was a risk, as all such speculations were bound to be, especially with the Jews; but it was a necessary risk, and Cedonius was not the man to be frightened of such a thing. It was over a year since he had first fully understood the object of Hypatius' tactics in constantly raising the price of his freedom, and he knew that the only hope of buying his release lay in a sudden attack upon Hypatius, when he was least expecting it, backed with a larger amount

of money than Hypatius could suspect him of possessing. Once he had collected such a sum, he would ask for his freedom, while Hypatius was entertaining some of his business friends. Cedonius knew exactly what reply he would receive. Hypatius would look at him with that sly grin, would mention the hardness of the times and the increased inflation, and would demand about fifteen per cent more than he had done last time. He would appeal to his business friends to be witnesses of the justice of his decision, and he would expect Cedonius to leave the room in disappointment and annoyance. Then they could all laugh at the incident together, and Hypatius could bask in the admiration of his friends for his astuteness as a businessman. But Cedonius did not mean things to happen in this way, for, when his speculation with Myonides had succeeded, he would have in his possession a sum of money that was twenty-five per cent larger than Hypatius' last price, and he would pay him what he asked. The business friends would laugh — certainly, they would laugh — but Hypatius would not relish their laughter.

Rufus, a small man and simple almost to the point of stupidity, was plucking a goose in the kitchen. No one but Rufus would have worked on such an afternoon, and outside in the yard at the back of the house, lying under the wall, up which there straggled a dusty and unfruitful vine, four men were sleeping in a narrow slice of shadow, their arms thrown back, their mouths open, flies feeding at the corners of their lips. Rufus smiled at Cedonius, whom he idolized. He had given him all his savings — not a very impressive sum — with a complete trust in Cedonius' ability to double them for him, for Cedonius was everything

which he, Rufus, was not. He was strong, well built, self-reliant, successful; Rufus was weak, physically contemptible, self-effacing, and utterly insignificant. Cedonius would hardly have been aware of his existence, if he had not received from him the adoration which helped to strengthen his own self-respect. As a result he was fond of the little man, as he might have been fond of a mongrel dog, and the sight of him usually cheered Cedonius. But this afternoon the sight of Rufus with his mound of feathers, the goose's beak wobbling idly between his knees as he plucked it, annoyed Cedonius. The sweat on Rufus' face and the faint smell of the dead bird, the squalor of the kitchen, the heat of the dry air, and the sight of the sleeping slaves in the yard outside revolted him. Such was slavery, and he was angry at being a slave; angry at a world in which four out of every five men and women were mere things — goods, chattels, domestic cattle — with no rights and no redress for whatever might be done to them; angry at God for countenancing such a world. For a slave was only valued as an economic asset, and he was treated as expendable material. If his owner was an economical man, he husbanded his resources, getting the last ounce out of his slaves; if he was wealthy enough to indulge a taste for profligacy, he enjoyed the pleasures attendant upon wasting a slave or two, and they could be wasted in delicious ways, if one could afford to do so. But in any hands the smallest fault rendered the slave liable to the lash, the treadmill, or even the death penalty, for an owner might do as he wished with his property, and the law supported him in everything. Slaves had no rights; they could not even marry one another, though some masters allowed them to

live together for breeding purposes. There were good and bad slave owners, however, and conditions were better in Christian houses than elsewhere. Here, though the slave might grow too old to be profitable, he was still fed and housed, and not turned out into the streets to die, as often happened in pagan establishments. But in Christian houses there was the full rigor of the Church to be taken into account; for the smallest sin against God a lifetime of penance was exacted, while for the major sins like apostasy, murder, or adultery there was no penance, for there could be no forgiveness. The sinner was excommunicated, thrown out of the Church, and left to die without hope, cut off from God and slave to man.

Rufus was smiling at him, and Cedonius was sickened. The adoration of this mean deformity seemed suddenly to cast an unflattering light upon his self-esteem. He was worthy of the admiration and respect of better men than Rufus.

"Stop looking more idiotic than you need, and take Hypatius some vinegar and water," he said.

Rufus put the carcass of the goose on the floor and wiped the blood from his hands. Cedonius, knowing that he had hurt him, hovered between disgust and self-justification, and, as he was not a bad man, disgust won. He smiled at Rufus when he returned.

"You're coming tomorrow?" Rufus asked him.

Cedonius had forgotten that there would be the usual meeting at Lucius Collatinus' house the next day. It was typical of Rufus that he should remember. He was immersed in his Christianity to such an extent that he could be irritating at times, particularly with his habit of endless

quotations; he seemed to have a tag for every occasion. But Cedonius tolerated Rufus' obsession, partly because he was a Christian himself, and partly because in Rufus, who had no other interests, it was excusable. In Cedonius, who had other things to think about, it would have been merely silly. But he was glad that Rufus had reminded him of the meeting, for he wanted to go. For one thing, it was a duty, and, for another, he would probably meet Festus there — Festus who was butler in the house of one of the biggest bankers in Rome, and who might have some information for him.

Although it was two in the morning and still dark, the air was as warm as milk, and the streets of the Cispian hill were drenched with the smell of jasmine, as if the sun had only just set. It was an aristocratic quarter, and Cedonius and Rufus felt out of place as they walked past the gardened villas. Here there were no slaves sleeping at the sides of the roads, no dogs scavenging in the piles of refuse that filled the meaner streets of great tenement buildings, through which they had already passed. Here, too, the only thing to be heard was the distant noise of the slums down by the military camps near the eastern wall of the city. Even the leaves of the trees were silent, for there was no breeze, and a shower of scarlet hibiscus, hanging over a stucco wall, looked as black and motionless as though carved in dark stone or cast in bronze. The two men walked silently, near to the walls. They were neither ostentatiously furtive, nor foolishly conspicuous. They moved quietly on bare feet in such a way as to excite neither surprise nor

suspicion in anyone who might see them pass; but no one did see them, for the world was asleep.

They went through a side door into Lucius Collatinus' villa. The central hall, which was smaller than those of more modern houses and was open to the sky above, was already nearly full, although people came at different times rather than in a mass. It was a mixed crowd. Most of those present were slaves, but there was a sprinkling of free men: tradesmen, small businessmen like Hypatius, a few soldiers, a few professional men, and a very few representatives of the ruling class, most of whom were women, though in the case of the Collatine family the men were Christians too. It was no new thing for aristocrats to be found in the Church, but they were still rare, even if of late they had been coming in rather more frequently than before. The men stood together on one side of the hall and the women on the other, while at the end, at the top of a short flight of steps where a door opened into the main body of the house, the clergy were sitting round the stone table that was a feature of old Roman houses. The Collatine family were fairly recent converts, and hanging on the gray walls there were a number of new and rather ugly pictures of Moses, Elijah, the Apostles, and the Saints, which had only just replaced the portraits of the Etruscan ancestors of the family which had hung there for generations. Cedonius had not seen them before, and he was amused by the picture of Moses, which represented him as a Roman soldier except that instead of a sword he carried a serpent in his hand.

As men and women continued to arrive, the hall became

uncomfortably crowded. Rufus, standing at Cedonius' side, could see nothing, for his head was on a level with the shoulder blades of those around him, but Cedonius watched the people coming into the room, and taking their bread to the table, where a deacon with a basket received it. Cedonius looked for Festus, but he did not seem to have come. The banker who owned him lived on the Palatine, and Festus was often late in arriving.

As one of the priests tapped the table with a hammer, a signal to begin, Cedonius looked down at Rufus. He was the same color, from this point of view, as a cockroach — a sort of burnt, sandy color — and his hair looked dead and dust-filled. He was standing still, with his nose almost pressed to the back of the man in front of him, and Cedonius felt sorry for him. These affairs were Rufus' great moments, and he was doomed to be for ever sightless and submerged by his neighbors; it would almost have been a kindness to bring a box, so that he could stand on it, like a child watching a procession in the street.

Cedonius did not pay much attention to the ceremony — he was preoccupied with his own thoughts — but he made the responses in a firm voice. "And with thy spirit," he said, and was vaguely aware of the priest's voice saying, "Lift up your hearts." "We have them to the Lord," he replied in chorus with the others, as he wondered if Festus had arrived yet. He looked round, but could not see him. It would be annoying if the man didn't come after all. He noticed a man called Galbus up near the front; he had done business with him occasionally in the past, but he was not interested in him at the moment. After the consecration Cedonius moved along slowly with the other people

as they shuffled up to the steps. He held out his hands as the priest said, "The Bread of Heaven in Christ Jesus," and a deacon, whom he didn't recognize, held the cup as he sipped gently three times. His mind was concentrated now. You could not get through the Eucharist in a state of abstraction; he had often noticed that. "In God the Father Almighty," the deacon said, as Cedonius took his first sip — Festus would not come now, if he had not already arrived — "And in the Lord Jesus Christ . . . and in the Holy Spirit in the holy Church." "Amen," said Cedonius, and moved on, pressing the back of his hand to his mouth, the taste of wine still on his tongue.

When it was over, most of those present went up to the table to receive fragments of the bread, which they put into little boxes and concealed in the folds of their clothing. It was a dangerous practice, for, if one of these little boxes should be found upon a man, he would either be lynched by the mob or brought before the authorities on a charge of being a Christian; but in this way, week by week, the sacrament was taken by the people to their homes all over Rome.

Rufus went up with the others, and Cedonius looked round for Festus. The people did not disperse all at once, for a large number of people leaving a private house in the early hours of the morning would have caused too much comment to be safe, so they stayed behind, talking to each other until they could slip away, singly or in pairs, by every available door. Cedonius was never in a hurry to leave, for he got much of his business information at these gatherings. Festus was at the back of the hall, and Cedonius made his way toward him with difficulty, pushing between the

crowded people, apologizing and smiling. Festus too was smiling at his efforts to reach him, and the two men laughed at each other over the heads of the intervening crowd with the amusement which people affect at their own helplessness. Cedonius shrugged, turning his eyes upward with a gesture of comic despair as he became wedged between two fat men who were apologizing and trying to make themselves smaller with the embarrassment of the obese at their inability to shrink.

"Excuse me," Cedonius murmured. "I'm so sorry. Excuse me, please. Thank you. No, don't move. Yes, I can slip through. Excuse me."

A middle-aged woman with big dark eyes sunken into her head pressed herself against the man in front of her to let Cedonius pass, looking back over her shoulder with the smile of one more accustomed to tragedy than smiles, and a small sandy-colored man moved out of the way as much as he could, laughing at Cedonius, as he pushed by, with the brisk, conventional laughter of a tradesman who prides himself upon always being cheerful with his customers. Cedonius was filled with a feeling of well-being as he moved slowly between the warm bodies of his fellow Christians. He felt filled with affection for them, for he knew that he was in every way equal to each of them by virtue of the faith which he shared with them, and a little more than equal to them by virtue of his greater height and his superior physique. He had no lines of pain and tiredness on his face, no obese belly, none of the shriveling and contraction of middle age, none of the guardedness of eye which grows on a man with years of self-defense. He knew that the people to whom he apologized, and to whom he

showed the strength and regularity of his teeth as he smiled, were thinking that it was a splendid thing that such a man as Cedonius should be in the Church — a man who would free himself, and who would go far; a man to watch. He smiled with even greater gentleness, showing a little more of his teeth, as he pushed gently past a gray-faced woman with a sagging bosom and wispy hair, which lay thinly upon a slightly bald head. She flushed as she smiled up at him, and he knew that he had cheered her with a kind of nameless and vague sense of hope. By the time that he reached Festus, he was in the frame of mind of an actor determined to perform as he had never performed before, in order to satisfy the high expectation of his public. An actor could not let his public down, and Cedonius knew that he must free himself for the same reason: he could not betray the confidence of his fellow Christians; he was a man to watch, and first and foremost they should watch him win his freedom.

Festus was twenty years older than Cedonius, and he admired the younger man with the admiration a successful businessman reserves for someone whom he recognizes to be even more talented than himself. He had been concerned in Cedonius' recent speculation in the tin market, and he had heard during the previous day that it had succeeded. It was astonishing what judgment the younger man had displayed, and with what confidence he had handled the affair. Cedonius, who had not received news of this particular venture for some days, was delighted by Festus' congratulations upon its success and behaved as though he already knew of it, hiding his pleasure under an air of ease and indifferent self-confidence as though he had

known all along that the thing could not fail. It was a well-chosen attitude, giving no impression of conceit, but seeming to reveal a modest omnipotence: modest because its possessor was unaware of it, or aware of it only as a quality with which he had been born and for which he took no credit.

The two men talked quietly of their mutual interests. Each was able to give information to the other, although careful only to inform the other of those things he wished him to know, for each kept some things to himself. One did not share everything in the business world — there were certain times and certain markets in which it was more profitable to operate quietly and by oneself. Cedonius had not told Festus of his investment with Myonides the Jew, and Festus, for his part, had his private dealings of which he never spoke to Cedonius until they succeeded, when he would introduce them casually. "By the way," he would say, "I had a little success with bananas from north Africa last week. I told you about it some time ago, didn't I? Didn't I mention it? Well, it was only a small thing; I must have forgotten to speak of it, when I saw you last. As a matter of fact, it was quite profitable, as these things go . . ." and so on. Each man knew that the other kept certain things secret from him; each recognized the true nature of the "little success" of which the other told him after its completion. Such conventional subterfuges and such regular deceits were accepted by both men as proper elements of the business world. But on this occasion Cedonius wanted to discover Festus' opinion of his investment with the Jew Myonides without revealing to him its nature or even the fact that he had made such an investment at all. He led

the conversation gently in the direction which he wished it to follow, and eventually brought it round to the ever-green topic of doing business with the Jews. Afterwards, looking back upon it, it seemed to Cedonius as though his life had been building up to this moment, rather as the clouds may gather peacefully and almost unnoticed, until the first flash of lightning marks the beginning of the storm. For Festus, casually and quite unaware of the importance to Cedonius of what he was saying, told him that the older he became the less he trusted the Jews. Only during the course of the previous evening he had heard that the Jewish financier, Myonides, had absconded.

Cedonius was sufficiently well controlled to be able to hide his reaction from Festus, but every sense of his body had suddenly become greatly sharpened, and everything looked so different as a result of the focus into which it had come that it no longer seemed a real world he was moving in but the world of a dream. He was aware of the noise of the blood in his ears, of the pulsing and tingling of the blood in his hands, and of the slight inadequacy of every breath he took.

Rufus joined him, as he made his way toward the door, and Cedonius was conscious of a rising panic. If Festus' story of Myonides were true, the whole foundation of his life had collapsed. Nearly all his own money was lost; he had lost the money entrusted to him by his fellow slaves; and — worst of all — he had lost some of Hypatius' money, which he had invested without either his knowledge or his consent. Hypatius was not the man to forgive such a thing. Cedonius suspected that Hypatius would actually welcome an opportunity of this sort to fetter him even more securely

in his service, and, in any case, he would certainly exact every penny in one way or another; if he could not recover his money in kind, he would make Cedonius pay in other ways.

Cedonius recovered quickly from his incipient panic. He was a self-reliant man, and he had never contemplated failure. Things did not fail for him, and therefore things could not have failed now. Festus must have been mistaken. Despite the reassurance with which he managed to calm himself, the strangeness that his surroundings had acquired remained, and the dawn over Rome seemed ominous and brittle. The sky was light, and there were a few people in the streets through which the two men made their way toward Myonides' house down by the Tiburtine gate. As they walked Cedonius told Rufus what had happened, for he had to tell someone, and he trusted Rufus, partly because he was so devoted a creature, and partly because he was too simple to be anything but trustworthy. But on this occasion Rufus was irritating. He did not seem to understand the magnitude and seriousness of the disaster, and he kept advising Cedonius to trust in God: a piece of advice Cedonius greeted with the contempt and annoyance that it deserved.

"But you can't be blamed, if the man has disappeared," Rufus said. "Hypatius will be annoyed at losing money, but he must realize that if you are authorized by him to invest his money and to make money for him there are bound to be times when you lose it. No one can be successful all the time. As for your own money, it's not very important. You can always make some more, if you want to; and anyway God loves the poor."

"And what of my freedom?" Cedonius snapped. "That is not very important either, I suppose. It is a mere nothing that I have worked for years to accumulate enough to buy my freedom, and that now, almost at the moment of success, I should be bounced back to the starting point again. Is that it? Perhaps Hypatius will be so pleased with me for losing his money that he will make me free as a present."

Rufus looked miserable, and he was out of breath in his attempt to keep abreast of Cedonius, who was walking faster and faster as his irritation and impatience grew.

"But the authorities are bound to catch the man," Rufus said. "He is too well known to get clear away. All you've got to do is to wait, and you'll be back where you were. You can't do anything or achieve anything by worrying. You've no alternative but to trust in God this time."

"Trust in God! Trust in God! All you can talk about is trust in God. What do you think I'm doing anyway? You're not the only Christian in the world. I do trust in God. Why do you think that I went to Collatinus' house this morning? Do you think that I risk the penalties of being a Christian for fun, and with no trust in God? But I trust Him to make me free. I trust Him to use me: to make use of my talents. What can I do for God as a slave? Do you think that trusting in God is the same thing as sitting back with an idiotic grin on my face waiting for the worst to happen, like a cow chewing the cud, while the man who is going to slaughter it swings the poleaxe? That may be your idea of being a Christian, but it's not mine."

"But I don't see what else you can do," Rufus said. "If the man has really gone, you can't hide it indefinitely from Hypatius."

They were walking down a long wide street of big modern brick buildings of six or more stories, in each of which several dozen working-class families lived. Such buildings had been replacing the smaller, individual houses for half a century, and more and more Romans were living in great blocks of this sort. They were depressingly raw, the mortar dry, white, and crumbly between the badly laid bricks, and the windows festooned with washing hung out to dry. Mounds of refuse and dust littered the sides of the streets, lying where it had been tipped from the windows above, and rows of half-naked, dirty figures were still sleeping close to the walls, or stirring idly, turning uninterested faces toward the two men as they passed. The sky was turning from violet to lemon, and it was already hot. Rufus mopped the sweat from his worried face. He wished that he wasn't so stupid and that he could help Cedonius, but everything that he said seemed only to make things worse.

"No. If Myonides has gone, I can't keep it from Hypatius," Cedonius said, "but there's no need for me to go running to him with my tail between my legs like some cur cringing up to its master for a whipping. Runaway slaves have become senators before now."

This was probably untrue, and, if it were by chance true, Cedonius had no knowledge of it; the idea of running away had not occurred to him until the moment of speaking. The impetus of the argument with Rufus had produced it.

"You can't do that," Rufus said, with a note of horrified pleading in his voice, and Cedonius realized at once not only that he could do it but that he would, if he did not find Myonides. The mere prospect cheered him, for it was sufficiently radical and dramatic to restore his self-respect.

No one could admire a slave cringing back to his master to beg for forgiveness, but for a man who set himself over against organized society by defying its laws there would always be a kind of respect that bordered on awe. Such a solution provided the only escape from the humiliation of return and failure; for it was not so much the punishment he would receive from Hypatius, not even the failure of all his plans and the loss of his slowly accumulated capital that was at the bottom of Cedonius' panic-stricken reluctance to return. It was the wreckage of the role in which he had chosen to appear and had built up with such care and skill over the years. Even to himself, he could not face the prospect of appearing without the grease-paint and the costume of the man whom it was worth watching, the man of modest omnipotence, and the man who was bound to go far. Admittedly, it was impossible to salvage that role entirely, for even the expedient of flight could not hide from such of his friends as Festus the disaster that had overtaken him; but at least it would remove him from them, and in their absence, away from their pleased or pitying eyes, he could continue to regard himself in the same role as before. Others might change their opinions of him, withdrawing some of their admiration and respect and revising their ideas of his character, but he, himself, could continue to be the unique Cedonius. Moreover, he would be the only one to know that he was still the same, and to the rich texture of his old role would be added the luster of a lost cause, borne alone in the face of the world, and borne successfully. Moreover, it was true that by no means all runaway slaves finished their lives in the arena or on the gibbet, as the law prescribed. The Empire was full of

roving bands of desperate men who lived by their wits and by their skill with the sword; the hills were full of such fraternities of despair, and the injustice of the social order ensured them a regular supply of recruits. If the worst came to the worst, Cedonius could join them, but if he were lucky, and if he behaved intelligently, there would be no need to condemn himself to a life of violence and robbery. Slaves had been known to get out of Italy, and to work their way to one of the colonies, where the government was neither able nor very anxious to inquire too closely into everyone's antecedents; and in such a place, if he could reach it, there might be a chance to build a new life less hazardous than that which was offered by the robber bands. But if he was to be successful in this, it was essential that he should leave Rome before Hypatius heard that Myonides had absconded. In other words, if Festus' report proved to be true — and he would know in less than twenty minutes whether it was reliable or not — he would have to begin his flight immediately without going back to the house to collect clothes or money. In itself, such a visit would not be much of a risk, for the chances of Hypatius having already discovered that anything was amiss were extremely remote, but the loss of time might be fatal.

They hurried along in silence for a quarter of an hour, Rufus red with exertion and misery, and Cedonius unaware of anything but this new possibility. It was as if he had slammed the doors of his everyday mind so that he could concentrate exclusively upon the surprising contents of this unsuspected compartment that had flown open and spilled the idea of flight over his mind in such a flood that all the

normal criteria of judgment, by which he was accustomed to make dispassionate criticisms of his own plans and actions, were submerged. The thought of flight took charge of him. He did not feel as if he had produced it, for it seemed to have a life of its own and an ability to develop of itself which he did nothing to help, so that as soon as a new facet of the plan of escape appeared, the whole of its inherent possibilities unfolded, as it were, of its own volition.

Myonides' house was small and old, a relic of the pretenement building days, and it was situated close to the city wall just to the north of the Tiburtine gate. The street in which it stood was narrow and deserted; the house, itself, was shuttered, and the doors were locked. Cedonius banged against them with his fist, and the noise fell into the hollow silence of the empty house. He shouted, but no one answered. A young man with a slight squint and extremely dirty teeth leaned out of the window of a house on the other side of the street and looked at them with the flat uninterested eyes of a fish. Cedonius called, and asked him if the house was empty. He nodded slightly, but said nothing.

"You're sure?" Cedonius asked. "There's no one here at all?"

"They've gone," the young man replied. "There were people looking for them yesterday."

"How long have they gone for, do you know?" he asked; but the young man did not know.

The act of leaving the house would be so final and ir retrievable that Cedonius lingered, although he knew that

he would discover nothing more. He examined the windows, went round to the back of the house, peered in through two ill-fitting boards, and even knocked at a house next door, where he heard the same story from a fat woman whose face was the color and consistency of pastry, and whose oily black hair fell in loops and tails over her shoulders. She stood aslant and crabwise to the door in a slightly defensive attitude, one arm supporting a flaccid bosom in the folds of her dress, as she looked at Cedonius through suspicious little eyes.

"One evening they were there just as usual," she said, "and in the morning they were gone, the lot of them; and no one saw a thing, or heard so much as a mouse squeak. I said to Bartimillo that they were no good, that lot. I wouldn't have trusted that Myonides with half an old loaf. And now the police are after them," she ended with a sort of lugubrious triumph.

"The police?" Cedonius said. "They've been here?"

"Oh, yes! They were here yesterday morning, going over the place and poking about; but they didn't find anything. They'd made a clean sweep, that lot."

"They didn't discover where Myonides had gone to?" Cedonius asked her, but she wrinkled her upper lip, closing her little eyes in contempt at the simplicity of the police for thinking that "that lot" would be silly enough to leave a clue as to their whereabouts.

As Cedonius and Rufus left her, Rufus looked at his hands.

"They're bound to find him in the end," he said. "He can't just disappear."

"And in the meanwhile I am supposed to crawl back to Hypatius, and take whatever is coming to me? Is that it?" Cedonius said. "It's no use, Rufus. I'm not going to do it. I'm getting out."

Rufus, who had difficulty in expressing himself clearly at the best of times, felt trapped and impotent. He was quite certain that if Cedonius ran away he would be doing the wrong thing, but he knew, before attempting to do so, that he would be unable to dissuade him from going.

"Then I shall come with you," he said, with a little explosion of temper that Cedonius failed to notice.

"No, you won't," Cedonius said. "There's no reason for you to do so, and, apart from that, two of us would be much less likely to succeed in getting out of the country than one on his own."

"You're putting yourself outside the law before you have given the authorities a chance to get Myonides back," Rufus said. "If they get him tomorrow, it won't be any good as far as you're concerned. You'll be rather more of a criminal than Myonides from the moment that you break away. For God's sake, don't do anything rashly and in a moment of panic."

"It is you who are in a panic," Cedonius said icily, turning on Rufus with a hard face. "It is you who are trying to push me into the blind idiocy of a return to the certainty of punishment and humiliation, instead of using my wits and making the best of the situation. You know as well as I do that I can expect no justice from Hypatius."

"You can expect justice from God," Rufus said.

He looked like a stubborn rabbit, Cedonius thought.

"And if I use my intelligence and make a break from Rome, God and his justice will desert me? Is that it?" Cedonius said.

"No, but you'll desert them," Rufus replied. He felt as if he had been driven into a corner, and his desperation increased. "You've always trusted in yourself, and you're doing so now. You're behaving like an animal in the arena, relying upon its fangs and its muscles. You should come back with me."

"I will not come back with you," Cedonius said coldly. "I am going to make for Portus Augusti, where I shall get a place on a boat for north Africa. And I will do so now."

They were at the end of the narrow street in which Myonides' house stood, and without looking again at Rufus, Cedonius turned to the west and began to walk away quickly. Rufus called after him, and began to run.

"Cedonius," he shouted, "don't go! Wait, Cedonius!"

Cedonius did not even slow down, and he did not turn his head. Rufus stopped, his hands hanging by his sides. He knew that he could do nothing to stop him. He just stood there for a long time, watching Cedonius get smaller and smaller in the distance, and hoping that he would turn for a moment and wave. But Cedonius did not turn.

The sun was up. As Cedonius reached the outskirts of Rome and as the suburbs thinned, he began to relax. He had walked at a great pace since leaving Rufus, and he was sweating and out of breath, but now that he was free of the city he felt that the watershed of the crisis in his affairs had been passed; the fine point of decision had somehow come and gone, and he was moving in the new direction he

had chosen, with the force of a stream at its source, bounding and tumbling down the hill, foaming and sparkling with the energy of youth. Meanwhile, the world was awake, and under a sky that bubbled with the whistling of larks the peasants of Latium were crowding the Portuensian Way as they carried their goods into the city for sale. Men, moving along at a shuffling trot, were carrying loads of vegetables in coarse sacks of brown netting on their backs, their heads and shoulders bowed under their weight. Men and women with donkeys laden with panniers kept to the side of the road to avoid the slow, lumbering bullock carts piled high with watermelons, baskets of fruit, and mounds of small yellowish apples, and they were passed by men half running with great sheaves of cut flowers in baskets on their shoulders, their legs brown under their white or blue smocks, their bare feet moving silently in the white dust. Beads of water, with which the flowers had been sprayed to keep them fresh, trembled and flashed in the sun. Mounds of fruit bounced and stirred as the carts jolted, and a few small apples lay where they had dropped in the dust like big round drops of dirty gold. Groups of peasants, the men in faded blue, the women in black, were driving flocks of white goats or sheep with brown wool and black faces in to the market to be slaughtered. Occasionally a child went by, leading a calf or driving it from behind with a stick and shouting at it from time to time. The blue air of the morning was filled with the noises of men and of animals; the cries of the drivers and the baaing of their sheep; the creaking of wheels and the soft drumming of cloven feet; the shouts of children and the incessant humming of insects.

Cedonius seemed to be the only person moving against the steady stream of people and animals heading for Rome, but no one took any notice of him. He had avoided the police post at the city's boundary by crossing the wall at one of the many places where it had fallen into a heap of loose rubble and stones, for it had not been repaired for years, and was no longer regarded as a serious military necessity. He picked up the apples and wiped off the dust on his skirt: he was hungry, and he had neither money nor food for the journey. Surprisingly, for he was a man who was accustomed to planning his own affairs with care, this did not worry him at all. He felt buoyant, confident, and greatly relieved to have shed the load of Rufus' niggling anxieties and craven caution. It was almost as if the shock of his own ruin had exhilarated him and lightened him of a burden of cares and plans that had been weighing him down for years. Although he was thirty-three he realized that he had long felt like a man of forty. Now he felt as if he had been lifted back into his early twenties. Every detail of the morning seemed brighter and sharper than usual, and the colors of the country glittered with a crisp brilliance he had experienced only once before, after a long illness which he had spent in a dark and colorless room as a boy. He found he could isolate the component sounds that made up the general and continuous noise of the country, distinguishing the faint and distant cry of a plover from the constantly spilling noise of the larks, and from the nearer, almost inaudible chorus of small insects in the grass of the fields. Even the features of the people whom he passed seemed to be peculiarly memorable. He could

not believe that he would ever forget a single detail of all that he saw, and in this he was right, for he remembered the scenes and events of the morning with that kind of clarity which grows sharper as the events recede in time. As the years passed, the memory of that morning was heightened and transformed in the process of memory, eventually attaining a stature a little larger than life and a significance suffused with colors and overtones that seemed to be distilled from reality rather than being faithful reproductions of it.

Portus Augusti was only about twelve miles from Rome, but Cedonius could not decide when would be the best time to arrive. If he were to walk without resting, he would get there by noon, but he thought it might be better to enter the place by night. The more he thought of the problem of finding a place on a ship, the greater the difficulties appeared to be. He had no money, which did not matter very much, and he had no papers, which might matter very much indeed. Most ships' captains would want to see a man's credentials before engaging him as crew. Although he had not thought of it before, and although he knew nothing of such things, Cedonius felt sure that regulations at the ports must inevitably be strict. Otherwise there would be nothing to hinder a regular flow of runaway slaves out of the country. However, he had got a good start, for Hypatius would be unlikely to discover his absence until the evening, and he would neither know where he had gone, nor would he have any means of discovering his destination. All he could possibly do would be to warn the authorities, who would issue a description

of yet another runaway slave; but there were many runaway slaves, and Cedonius thought that he had a very good chance of making good his escape.

By ten o'clock in the morning he had reached a point where the road began to go steadily downhill. The Tiber valley widened into a flat marshy plain, three miles across, in which, away to the south, the river wound in great loops. It was intolerably hot, and the birds' song of the early morning had been replaced by the fretting of cicadas on the dry hills to the north of the road and by the croaking of frogs down in the marshes to the south. In the distance the river flashed and glinted as it reflected the sun, and beyond the deep rich greens of the marshes the bulk of the Alban hills quivered and trembled in the heat haze. Cedonius wanted to rest — to lie down under an olive tree and get cool — but he knew that the only advantage he had over Hypatius was one of time. Whenever he thought of stopping briefly it also occurred to him that he would be wise to rest — it would be easier to enter the town by night. But each time, he immediately suspected himself of succumbing to special pleading, so he continued to walk, wiping the sweat from his face, feeling it trickle down his shoulders, and wiping the dust from his dry lips. It was almost too hot to think. He could hit upon no solution to the problem of finding a place on board a ship without being able to produce any papers. He could think of no alternative to being lawfully engaged as a member of a ship's crew other than that of playing the stowaway. Such a role could only lead to eventual detection and disaster. It was not surprising that the hills were full of runaway slaves who had failed to escape from the

country, and had resorted to brigandage as an alternative. Because he did not want to admit to himself that he had been too sanguine when he had told Rufus that he would go to Portus Augusti and there find a ship, he blamed the heat. It was just that it was too hot to think properly, and his feet were beginning to hurt, for he was unused to so much walking. Since people had escaped before, there must be a way of doing it again.

Half an hour later he saw the sea. It was sparkling and glittering in the sun, barely distinguishable through the shimmer of the heat haze, but it was the sea. The road had rounded a last shoulder of hill which had hidden it until that moment. Six miles away and only a slightly deeper blue than the sky, it lay low on the horizon. In front of him the road dropped to the flat, swampy coastal plain, which lay below him like a green and steamy napkin under the full force of the sun. Cedonius stopped, looking for the town, but the haze made it impossible to see. Even the willow trees a few hundred yards away shimmered in the heat, dissolved, and seemed to break up, resting on slices of unexpected sky. There had been very little breeze in the hilly country through which he had traveled. He knew that the plain would be breathless, so he decided to rest for a few minutes before going on. He stumbled off the road, his feet slipping in the hot crumbly earth of an olive grove, and threw himself down on his back under the nearest tree, closing his eyes and feeling the sweat run down his flesh in little rivulets. Some of his confidence had gone; for a moment, as he lay there, he wondered whether he should go back. He could reach Rome long before it became dark, and Hypatius would probably not

have discovered his absence by then. He pulled the little apples from a pocket where he had put them earlier in the morning and sank his teeth into one of them. It was sour and hard, but it was better than nothing, and it helped his thirst. Rufus would be pleased to see him — disgustingly pleased — and would bark round his heels, wagging his tail like an absurd little dog. The mere thought of it appalled Cedonius, and the thought of Festus and his business friends obsessed him too. Their bland sympathy and the smooth easy words of consolation which they would offer would hurt like so many bites of a scorpion. Behind each word Cedonius would be able to recognize the unexpressed thoughts that would be spoken only when he was no longer present. He had heard conversations of a similar sort often enough. While the victim was present, every conceivable kind of help would be offered — except financial help, of course, that was against the rules; but as soon as he left the room little smiles would curve the corners of the sympathetic lips, and someone would say, "Poor chap! It's bad luck, but he's had it coming to him for years. He would never take advice." Then someone else would continue the game, rubbing his hands and replying, "Yes, that was exactly my experience of him too. Able in his way, I suppose, but absurdly conceited. Oh well, it's a fool's game, playing with fire without the intelligence to protect your fingers from burns. I can't say I've much sympathy for him, really."

Cedonius threw the core of his apple at the trunk of the nearest olive tree, and missed. It would be intolerable, having to endure that kind of thing. The sweat had dried on his face, and as he ran his fingers through his hair he felt

the dust caked on his forehead. He could not go back to Rome and Hypatius now. However hard it might be to escape from the country, it was worth trying, for even the last resort of joining a band of outlaws in the hills was preferable to the ignominy of return. He sat up, clasping his knees in his arms and half closing his eyes against the glare. He wondered if there were any Christians in the hills; not that he minded very much, for one could be a Christian by oneself — at least he supposed so — and even if one could not, the whole thing seemed rather remote from the present moment. It seemed a century ago that he had eaten the bread at Lucius Collatinus' house. Suddenly his muscles contracted and he sat upright. He had thought of a way of escaping from Italy without papers. If he could find a ship with a Christian in command, his lack of papers would no longer matter, for a Christian would give him a passage. But he realized almost immediately that there were two great difficulties to overcome before this plan could succeed: for one thing, there might be no such person as a Christian ship's master; and for another, even if such a man existed and happened to be waiting to sail into Portus Augusti at just this particular time, Cedonius had no idea how to find him. Christians did not advertise themselves, as he knew only too well, and it would be difficult enough to make any contact with the Church in a strange town, unless one had been armed in advance with an introduction, let alone to find a particular Christian in a particular profession or trade. It was obvious that his first object must be to find a Christian — just any Christian — and through him to meet the local priest. If anyone could help, it would be a priest.

He reached up above his head and pulled some half-ripe olives from a branch. They were warm and hard, but as he rolled one of them in his mouth, biting it and squeezing it between his teeth, the faint woody flavor of the juice refreshed him and helped to quench his thirst. He knew that in the past he must have heard the names of Christians who lived in Portus Augusti. If only he could remember them, but he didn't even know how to begin searching his memory. His mind seemed to be quite blank.

He was too restless to sit still any longer. As he left the shade of the olive tree, the heat of the sun engulfed him as water engulfs a minnow when it is thrown back into a pool. Within a quarter of an hour he had reached the coastal plain. Sour grass and reedy ditches stretched for miles, flat and unbroken by anything but willow trees for as far as he could see, and the sea had disappeared below the shimmering horizon. He saw a heron a few hundred yards away, standing on one leg like a bundle of rags on a stake, and a little farther on a great yellow toad with a shining pepper-colored skin was sitting in the middle of the road. Cedonius kicked a little shower of grit and dust at it with his toe, and it leaped away at an angle wholly unexpected and different from the direction in which it had been facing, twisting itself in mid-air, its legs streaming out behind it like lace, so that it faced forward again before landing with a little thud on its soft damp belly. Somewhere at the back of his mind he thought that he could remember Festus mentioning a shipping agent who worked in Portus Augusti, and was a Christian; but he could not remember the man's name.

It took Cedonius two hours to cover the plain. When

he was within a mile of the town, he saw three people driving a flock of skinny goats toward the road from the fields to the north. As the animals reached the road, they began to cross it, making for the grass on the other side. One of the men began to run, waving his arms and shouting "Eeyah, Eeyah, you brutes!" in an attempt to stop them. Cedonius ran off the road, and turned the animals back by shouting "Eeyah, there!" and waving his arms violently in imitation of the drover. The man was a typical peasant, small and leathery-faced, with wiry black hair and brown teeth. He joined Cedonius, and between them they chivied the goats back on to the road, driving them in the direction of the town.

"They've no sense, the dirty beasts," the man said.

When the two other people reached the road, Cedonius saw that they were women. One of them, probably the drover's wife, was as brown and leathery as her husband, and the other was a girl of about sixteen with brass studs in her ears and a coarse, attractive face. Cedonius picked up a stick from the side of the road, and walked with them, tapping the goats lightly on their rumps when they loitered, while with his other hand he tried to brush away a swarm of flies which had transferred their attention from the animals to the new and untapped field of his face and neck. If he stayed with these people, he might be able to walk past the police post into the town without having to answer any questions at all, for a group of peasants driving their flock into the market would be too commonplace an occurrence to attract the attention of the police. It would involve a slight risk, because his clothes were not the clothes of a peasant; but they had become so dusty and creased on

the journey that they would probably pass unnoticed, and it would be a far surer and quicker way of getting into the town than searching for some unguarded place away from the road where he could enter unseen.

As they approached the town, the swamps came closer and closer to the road, and the sour pasture gave way to a morass of reeds and rushes. Despite the sun, or perhaps because of it, the place smelled dank, and the sharp smell of rotting vegetation and slime floated across the road almost as palpably as a cloud. When they drew near to the town, Cedonius could see people half lying, half sitting in the small wedge of shade cast by the town wall, and the white paint of a police post by the gate. He gave the nearest goat a hit across its rump with his stick, shouting "Eeyah, there!" as loudly and roughly as he could; and as though the action was infectious, the man and the two women began to do the same, hitting the animals in front of them and shouting "Oola! Eeyah, you brutes" as though their lives depended on it. The leading animals trotted into the stone gateway, filling its width from side to side and jostling each other, and in the shade of the wall a man laughed, making some joke about the pleasures of driving a flock of goats through the August sun. A man in the uniform of the police appeared in the doorway of the white hut, looking out with a sort of bored arrogance, and watching the bouncing of the girl's bosom as she ran after a goat that had turned off under the wall. She headed it off, driving it back into the flock, and a minute later they had all passed through the gate. Cedonius went with them as far as the market place, and there he left them.

He wanted to go straight to the docks, but he was afraid

that there might be a restricted area in which only those people with passes were allowed to go, and he did not want to run any unnecessary risks. He walked slowly in the direction of the sea, stopping at each corner and glancing up the street to make sure that there was not a checking post ahead of him. It infuriated him that he could not remember the name of Festus' shipping agent. It was the only detail that remained hidden in his mind, for he had remembered the time and the place of the conversation with Festus in which the man had been mentioned. It had been over a year ago. Festus had tried to interest him in a cargo of skins that had arrived from Numidia of which this Christian in Portus Augusti had informed him. There had been a chance of buying them cheaply, but at the time Festus had been unable to raise the money, and he had asked Cedonius to join him in the business on a fifty-fifty basis. On the face of it, it had seemed to be an attractive proposition, for the price of the leather had been well below current wholesale prices, and, since leather was invariably in short supply, the army was always a ready buyer. But Cedonius had refused to have anything to do with it. Leather from north Africa was a risky investment: it was impossible to tell how many cow hides there might be in a particular cargo, and how many hides of other kinds. Goatskin could be sold quite well, though not at the price of cow, but camel was almost useless, and the army would not touch it. The more Cedonius recalled of the incident, the nearer the agent's name seemed to float to the surface of his mind, but it never quite emerged. The harder he tried to remember it, the more elusive it seemed to become. He was afraid that he would never recapture

it by force. If he stopped trying, it would pop up suddenly and unexpectedly, but he had not the time to wait indefinitely for his memory to oblige him. It was vital to recapture it by conscious effort.

As he drew nearer to the docks, the streets became narrower and dirtier. There were a few warehouses, but most of the houses were mean mud-daubed huts, washed over with bright colors and in varying stages of crumbly decay and filth. Many of them were public places where sour new wine and raw spirits were cheap and plentiful, and there were a number of shops with festoons of rope, bolts of cloth, cheap knives, and canvas clothing piled against the walls. The proprietors stood in the doorways, calling to those who passed with the persuasive unction peculiar to the Levant; they seemed to be Syrians, or doubtful Greeks from Asia Minor with a mixed and intricate heritage. A few prostitutes leaned from the least appetizing of the windows, displaying their unsavory shoulders and addressing every man who passed with the same mechanical and unconvincing endearments, but there were not many of them, for secular prostitutes did not flourish in the face of the competition from their sacred sisters in the Temple of Aphrodite, which lay on the outskirts of the town to the south. It was only a small modern temple; in fact, from the outside it could hardly be distinguished from a private house, but inside it had been decorated with some bogus columns and a few ecclesiastical oddments, to create the right atmosphere, and it provided more attractions than could be supplied by the whores of the waterfront. The older sailors made an easy impression upon their less experienced juniors by comparing it unfavorably to the

great Temple of Aphrodite at Corinth, where there were said to be over seven hundred girls, and where the statue of the goddess was twelve feet high and plated with gold. Cedonius was surprised when he came to the end of one of these streets and found that he had reached the harbor, for there had been no sign of a police post.

It was about an hour later that he heard a man shouting repeatedly, "Camillus, Camillus, Camillus . . ." to no one in particular, when — with no apparent connection — the name of the shipping agent appeared in his mind of its own accord: Gaius Galbus. The problem now was to find him. Cedonius, who was standing near a flight of stone steps that led down to the dirty green water of the harbor, went down and washed the dust from his face and neck, rubbing the tepid water over his arms. When he had finished, he felt revived and alert and knew now that he was going to succeed.

In fact, it was not until the evening that he found the shipping agent. Cedonius made his first inquiries with discretion, for he was afraid of accosting someone whose curiosity, if aroused, might have been dangerous; but after receiving innumerable bored replies from people who had never heard of Gaius Galbus, he cast discretion aside, and began to ask in every warehouse and shipping office along the quay. In one of them he was told that this was where Gaius worked; he was not there at the moment, but was expected to return immediately. Cedonius decided to wait for him. Finally he came, an affable man with gray hair and the easy manner of someone who is accustomed to meeting people for the first time every day. He gave the impression of having built around himself such a shell of

conventional sociability that any attempt to reach his private existence would have been as unlikely to succeed as an attempt to penetrate a crab's shell with a straw, but when — after introducing himself as a friend of Festus — Cedonius explained that he had not come on business but that he was a Christian, and that he wanted to find the local priest, Gaius seemed unable to reply, as though his weapons of common conversation had momentarily failed him. Instead, he fussed with some papers on his desk and then, as if suddenly discovering something for which he had been searching, he said, "What am I thinking about! You must be thirsty. Have a glass of this, won't you?" He produced a bottle of thin white wine. It was not until twenty minutes later that he rose and said, "We'd better go and see this man. He lives quite near."

In the street the affability of the man increased. Cedonius wondered if he had happened to address his questions, earlier in the afternoon, to the only men in Portus Augusti who had never heard of Gaius, for he seemed to know everyone whom they passed. As he led Cedonius back along the quay in the direction from which he had come, words flowed out of him without a pause or a break. He took Cedonius' arm lightly, holding his elbow with a warm hand in an attitude of affectionate patronage. This was rather spoiled by Cedonius' greater height, but, even so, it succeeded in making Cedonius feel ungainly and a little boorish. The sky was turning green as the sun sank and a light breeze had sprung up, stirring the rigging in a forest of motionless masts by the quay, but when they turned into the narrow street, through which Cedonius had walked before, it was airless, hot, and dark. The prostitutes were

still hanging from their windows; some drunks were singing and shouting in the wine shops, and the air smelled of garlic and of urine.

Halfway down the street Gaius stopped and rapped lightly on the door of a small dark house that seemed to be half ruined and empty. A woman next door leaned out of her window and looked at them with a pair of big eyes with yellow whites, saying, "He's in. He got back an hour ago. Knock a bit harder."

Gaius knocked again and said, "He lives here, but he's out such a lot that it's difficult to catch him."

As a sailor over the road began singing, a fat man opened the door and looked at them in silence. Like those of his next door neighbor, the whites of his eyes were yellow, and he was shivering slightly, as if he was suffering from the fever that eventually attacked everyone who lived in the town for long. Gaius, beaming and talking without apparently taking a breath, began to back away in a little agitated dance of farewell, as though he were leaving two children to play together. Cedonius expected him to tell them not to be too rough and to be careful not to hurt themselves, but with a breathless little valediction he hurried off down the street, waving and calling, "Well, you'll be all right now, won't you? Goodbye to you both! Goodbye! It's been very nice . . ."

The priest lived in a room at the back of the house. There was a lamp on a box in the corner away from the window, and a bed of sorts by the wall, but there was very little other furniture except a table and a bench. As Cedonius explained the reason for his visit the priest pulled a shawl round his shoulders and looked at the floor with

a mournful expression. He was a middle-aged man, heavy and dull, and he kept sighing and pulling his shawl tighter, as though he were cold, though there wasn't a breath of air and the lamp made the room even hotter than the street outside. In giving an account of himself, the only thing Cedonius suppressed was the fact that Hypatius was a Christian; otherwise he told his story truthfully.

When he had finished, the priest sat wheezing and shivering in silence, as though he could think of nothing to say. Eventually he looked across at Cedonius with a heavy smile and said, "I'm not sure why you've come to me. At least, I see what you want of me, of course; you want me to help you to get out of the country; but I'm not sure that it's my job to do so. The Kingdom of God is like a tree, and it's my job to look after the birds who live in its branches; but you give me the impression of being a bird that is flying away."

"The Church is not confined to Italy," Cedonius said.

"No, but you're not running away from Italy alone," the man said. "You're running away from failure and humiliation. You talk of making a new start in the colonies, but it sounds to me like the old start all over again. You want to go somewhere where you can begin again to seek for those things which you have just failed to grasp in Rome: freedom, money, success. But the only freedom I can advocate is freedom from pride; freedom from desire. By going back to Rome you might get free of these things, because you would inevitably experience their opposites, but by going elsewhere you will bind yourself to them."

The man sounded like Rufus, although he was more articulate. Cedonius did not want to be angry, but he was

annoyed at having to suffer this kind of thing twice in one day.

"I didn't come to you for good advice," he said. "I came for help."

"Yes, yes, of course, you did," the priest replied. "I was trying to give it to you."

"Is that your last word?" Cedonius asked, for he had a taste for melodramatic clichés.

For the first time the man laughed. "No," he said. "It's only my first. I can't force you to do what you don't want to do, and even if I could, I shouldn't; for, if you did as I suggested against your will, you wouldn't be doing what I want you to do. I don't want you to endure humiliation and failure; I want you to accept them, which is quite a different thing, though you'd have to endure them after accepting them. But, in fact, I can't give you the help for which you are asking."

"You mean that you don't know a ship that will take me?" Cedonius said.

"No. I mean that I can't help you to run away from yourself, for you'll take yourself with you, wherever you go."

"But I'm not running away from myself. I'm running away from injustice, from slavery, from the malice, and the gibes of others at something that wasn't even my own fault. You talk as though it were I who had absconded with someone else's money. Can't you see that I've been broken by another man's crime? Is it right or just that I should suffer for it? If that's God's idea of justice, I don't want it."

"Don't you?" the priest asked. "No. I don't suppose you do. None of us want it, really. We spend most of

our lives avoiding it, even when we call ourselves Christians. But there's a good precedent for suffering for the sins of others: a precedent involving a cross."

"But the man who absconded wasn't even a Christian," Cedonius said angrily. "I could understand you if you told me to do this for another Christian; but he wasn't. He was a Jew."

The priest smiled. "When you come to think of it," he said, "that's rather funny."

He got up and pulled an old cloak round his fat shoulders, shivering and wheezing in the hot room. There was half a loaf on the table and the remains of a small shoulder of mutton. He pushed them over toward Cedonius.

"You'd better eat these," he said. "I've got to go out, but I'll be back in half an hour or so."

Cedonius ate all the bread and most of the meat. It was the first food he had touched since eating the apples picked up from the road that morning.

When the priest returned he said, "There's a man called Ptolemy in command of a boat which is sailing tomorrow afternoon for Hadrumetum with a cargo of cloth. I've arranged for you to go with him. If you're ready, I'll take you to the ship."

As they walked together down to the quay, Cedonius was tense and nervous with excitement. He was also rather astonished at the speed of his success, for he imagined that there could have been few men who had managed to get out of the country on the first day of their flight. But he had achieved success in this, as in other things, by using his intelligence: by resolution, self-reliance, and decision. He regretted the sharpness with which he had

spoken to the man at his side and wondered, suddenly, whether he had eaten all the food in the house.

"I haven't thanked you," he said, turning toward the puffing figure beside him. "I realize that you had to say what you did, before you helped me; it was your job. I didn't see it at the time."

"There are many things one doesn't see at the time," the man replied. "The difference between duty and love, for instance, and the weight of different yokes. So often a pretty yoke weighs heavier than an ugly one, though one doesn't think so at the time of choosing. You will know what I mean one day, and then you will discover, too, that one of the most unbearable things is to be thanked by a man whom you have failed to help."

"Well, you haven't failed to help me," Cedonius said. "I should have failed without you."

"Yes, I think you probably would have done so," he said. "That's some consolation. But I haven't helped you, for although you would have failed without me, in fact you have failed despite me. Your real failure is a failure to know yourself; a failure to recognize what it is that you're running away from. My failure is that I have been unable to help you to recognize it. I have arranged this matter of a ship for you, because I believe that when you have run as far as possible from what you think you're running from you may realize your mistake. You're like a cat with its tail on fire: no matter how hard it runs, its tail goes on burning. But apparently you've got to go on running for a little longer before you find this out for yourself. Here's the ship; that one by the bollard. I'll come aboard with you for a moment."

Ptolemy, the captain, was a Negro. The priest stayed only long enough to introduce Cedonius before he shuffled away, shivering and wheezing. It was quite dark, and Cedonius was afraid for a moment that the fat man would fall off the gangplank, but he saw him reach the quay in safety, and saw him stop to look back at the ship. He did not wave.

Cedonius slept on deck, but he slept badly. For a long time he was too tired to go to sleep, and the stars overhead looked impossibly remote and disinterested. He was unaccustomed to the noise of the water lapping against the side of the ship, and somewhere in the town a dog was howling interminably. He was irritated, too, at the stupidity and the incomprehensibility of the fat priest; but although the man had been talking nonsense, his words had left an unwelcome and obstinate flavor of God in Cedonius' mind. As a result he wanted to pray, but when he tried he found that he could not do so, and he realized, with a little sourness, that he had not prayed for a long time. Now, God seemed dead.

When at last he slept, he had a nightmare. He dreamed that he was in Collatinus' house. Filled with terror, sweating and trembling, he was pushing his way through the crowd of tightly packed people, while over their heads he could see the face of Hypatius, who was chasing him. "Excuse me. I'm sorry," he kept whispering, as he struggled to move through the warm and hideously retentive mass of bodies; but the faces that were turned to him were as featureless and smooth as the ends of sausages; and instead of the familiar words of the liturgy, the fat priest of Portus Augusti was rapping the table with a hammer and shout-

ing, "The kingdom of God is like a tree," over and over again.

When he awoke, he was stiff and cold, and the memory of all that had happened during the previous day returned with a sudden sickness of fear, as though reality had been infected by the soft horror of the dream. It was just before dawn. The sky, which was the color of smoke, was filled with the shapes and the cries of seagulls, wheeling and sliding above the thicket of masts; occasionally they tumbled to the sea with a gabble and a flurry of beating wings and outstretched necks, as a scrap of offal floated free of one of the boats.

Most of the cargo had been stowed during the previous days, but a few bales remained to be loaded, and there were a number of other jobs to be seen to which could be done only at the last minute: vats to be filled with fresh water; casks of bread to be carried aboard; cheeses to be trundled in barrows up the gangplank; sheep, pigs, and geese to be shipped; sails to be got ready for hoisting; and hatches to be battened down. Cedonius worked with the rest of the crew and sweated in the sun reflected from the green water. The legacy of uneasiness from the dream gradually disappeared during the morning, and by noon, when the men were told to rest for an hour before making ready to sail, Cedonius was free of it.

But he was too excited to rest, or even to lie down. While the rest of the crew went below to avoid the sun, Cedonius leaned over the wooden side of the ship, looking at the town and wondering if he would ever see Italy again. He did not mind, for he owed it nothing, and felt no affection for it. It was a prison camp for four-fifths of its people,

and it held no attractions for him — not even the memory of a love — for he had been self-sufficient enough to avoid the weakness of loving, the idiocy of being in love, and the bondage of being loved. For a moment the thought of Rufus crossed his mind, but it did not disturb him. Rufus would be miserable for a time, but he would recover, and Cedonius had never asked for his affection. He could look at the blue hills behind the town with the hard eyes of the prospector who had hoped that they would be full of gold but had found them full of stone. He could look at the hills, too, with the eyes of a runaway slave who had not been forced to join the bands of runaways with which they were filled; muddled, silly men, who lacked his own intelligence, and who had failed to break free of the grip of Italy. It had been so easy that for a moment he wondered at the stupidity of those who had failed and at the still greater stupidity of those, like Rufus, who remained in their bonds like docile pack animals, enduring whatever they might receive, working until they died, groaning and sweating without hope and without reward.

At this hottest time of day, there were few people about, and the quay was almost deserted. In retrospect, Cedonius could never understand how he had failed to notice the little group of men who were walking slowly along the waterfront. Perhaps he was too preoccupied by his thoughts, but whatever may have been the reason, it was not until he was disturbed by a sudden shout that he noticed them. It was Hypatius who had shouted. He was waving his arms and pointing at Cedonius, while the police who were with him were already running toward the ship. Cedonius

acted almost without thinking. He ran to the seaward side of the ship, and jumped overboard.

There was very little light in the small stone cell in which Cedonius was lying, for the only window was small and near the roof. Around him lay eight other men. The smell of their unwashed bodies, emaciated and covered with sores, disgusted him. They were snoring, and one of them, who had been beaten that day, kept crying out and whimpering in his sleep. Cedonius moved his aching shoulders and turned over. At first, after his capture by Hypatius, his only regret had been that he had not been lucky enough to be drowned in the harbor at Portus Augusti. Instead, he had been pulled out of the water, kicked, beaten, buffeted, and dragged back to Rome in irons. During the journey his despair had grown, until he had thought that he was past caring about what might happen to him. But when he had reached Rome, he had discovered that he had been mistaken. He had been dragged into Hypatius' room, half dead with tiredness, and Hypatius had stormed at him for half an hour, slowly working himself into a rage. At first Hypatius had been in control of himself, but this had not lasted long, and from sarcasm and insult he had passed to violence and revenge. Red in the face, his small eyes narrowed like those of an infuriated pig, his lips spluttering and dribbling with the force of his anger, he had struck Cedonius repeatedly across the face, as though each blow helped to dissipate a hatred that had been growing for months. He had accompanied his actions with a steady stream of invective, revealing to Cedonius how much he

had guessed of his pride and of his hopes of freedom, dragging the latter through the dust of defeat and pouring an acid bath of ridicule and scorn over the former. As a matter of fact, Hypatius was not a truly bad man, but he had only tolerated Cedonius' covert sneers for so long in deference to his usefulness, and he had been unable to resist this opportunity of revenging himself. Hypatius was middle-aged, bald, fat, and unappetizing; he had only achieved a minor success in life, and this had been the result of an unimaginative, though shrewd and calculating, meanness. Although Cedonius had been useful to him, his youth, his superior physique, and his incomparably greater talents had been a constant and unbearable annoyance, because they had formed the yardstick against which Hypatius had been forced to measure himself. The fact that Cedonius had been quite obviously aware of his own immeasurable superiority, and that he had been able to hide his contempt for Hypatius only with difficulty, had not made things easier. And Cedonius' flight and recapture had succeeded in bursting the restraints that had held Hypatius in check for so long and had made him so calculatingly unpleasant and insulting that Cedonius' apathetic despair of the journey had slowly changed to anger. This, of course had delighted Hypatius. In fact, the primary cause of his loss of self-control had been the sight of Cedonius' blank, unfrightened, unrepentant face. If Cedonius had been terrified, if he had begged for mercy, or even if he had been vulgarly defiant, Hypatius might never have gone to such lengths; but he had mistaken the silence of Cedonius' despair for an arrogant indifference to anything that he, Hypatius, might do; and this had filled him with such a gust

of fury that he had been shaking with rage throughout the interview. The sight of Cedonius gradually losing control of himself as he had goaded him and struck him gave Hypatius the most delicious pleasure, and at the same time it increased his desire to hurt him as he had never hurt him before. In the end, Cedonius had been taken outside into the yard and flogged. When he had collapsed, a bucket of cold water had been thrown over him to revive him, and he had been tied to the post again, and flogged for the second time. Then he had been sentenced to the treadmill for two months.

Since then, he had been at the mill for three days. As he lay on the stone floor of the small cell in which he and the other men slept, he wondered whether he would be able to survive the two months to which Hypatius had sentenced him; for the life of a slave condemned to the mill was not an easy one. From shortly after dawn until late in the afternoon the men were chained to the wooden spokes of the mill wheel, and they were forced to move round and round, in order to turn it. If one of them became tired, and moved too slowly for the taste of the overseer, he plied a rope upon the man's back to encourage him to work harder. This was quite a usual occurrence. But there were certain refinements to which the overseer resorted every now and again. As an extra punishment a cloth was bound round a man's eyes, so that he was forced to move round blindfold. Since the floor of the mill was rough and broken by large cobbles, a blindfolded man usually stumbled and fell before long; then he was dragged round by the spoke to which he was fastened, while the mill was kept moving by the other slaves. As he was

scraped and bumped over the uneven floor, the overseer's rope fell with monotonous regularity upon whatever part of the man's body happened to be uppermost at the time, and the other slaves, irritated at having to drag round a man as well as the mill wheel, took every opportunity to kick the prostrate body. Some of the smaller and weaker men had been known to break a rib or a wrist in this way, but as a matter of fact men seldom died at the mill; at least this was the case in Hypatius' mill, although it was not the result of any natural fondness on Hypatius' part for his slaves, but simply of his natural business acumen, for he was a mean man and he did not like to waste slaves any more than he liked to waste any other economic asset. Actually, Hypatius did not own a mill; he could not afford it. Instead, he shared one with three other businessmen in circumstances similar to his own. Richer men than Hypatius, who could afford their own mills, could also afford to lose a few men every year, and some of them made it a matter of policy to do so, for the example of a few deaths was excellent for the other slaves. It was astonishing how much better a man worked when he knew that if he was sentenced to two or three months in the mill he might not return from it. But such measures were too heroic for a small businessman like Hypatius, who had to conserve his slaves. Moreover, the Christian priests were obstinate and pigheaded about such things. It was difficult enough to stop them from meddling with ordinary domestic punishments, for they were incorrigibly sentimental as far as slaves were concerned; and if a man died under punishment they were inclined to make things very difficult for the owner or for the man responsible for the slave's

death. Of course, in pagan households this did not apply. It was Hypatius' misfortune that he had to keep in with the priests, but it was bad policy to quarrel with them.

Cedonius was lying on a thin scattering of straw that covered the floor of the cell, but he found it difficult to sleep. He was unaccustomed to extreme discomfort, and he had not been at the mill long enough to become hardened to the conditions there. Physically he was a strong man, and although the day's work left him exhausted, he worked well enough to avoid the attentions of the overseer most of the time. Even so, his shoulders were sore, and his legs were stiff, and he could not go to sleep on the hard floor. All the other men in the cell had been there longer than he had, and they were asleep. One of them was snoring in a way which made sleep almost impossible for Cedonius; his snores gradually becoming louder and louder until they reached a choking crescendo that seemed to threaten to strangle the man, after the snores they subsided and the whole process began again. Cedonius had already discovered that kicking the man only had a momentary effect and was not worth the energy involved. When he did sleep, Cedonius slept lightly and badly. Sometime during the night he felt something on his shoulder. He jerked himself upright with a convulsive movement of fear. It was Rufus. A dim shape in the darkness, he was stroking Cedonius' arm and begging him to be quiet. Cedonius had not seen Rufus since they had parted from each other in the street by Myonides' house on the morning of Cedonius' flight from Rome. He was still half asleep and for a moment did not recognize his friend. He said, "What are you doing? Let me go." There was a

guard on duty somewhere near the cells, but no one came at the sound of Cedonius' voice. When he had recovered his wits enough to recognize Rufus, Cedonius began to ask him why he had come and how he had got there. Rufus' reply accounted for the silence of the guard. He explained that he had bribed the man to allow him to come by night with a little extra food and a leather bottle half full of wine; but it was essential not to disturb the other prisoners, for if they had been awakened, there would have been a general hubbub, which might have aroused the overseer.

While Cedonius ate the food which his friend had brought him, Rufus spoke in an agitated and hurried whisper, telling him of all that had happened since Cedonius' flight and recapture. When Cedonius had left him in the street, Rufus had returned to the house, and at about noon Hypatius had sent for him. Somehow or other Hypatius had discovered Cedonius' absence. He had guessed that Rufus knew something of Cedonius' whereabouts, for he knew that the two men had been to Collatinus' house together. He had been in a towering rage, and had demanded to know where Cedonius had gone. Rufus, who was very nearly incapable of telling a direct lie, and who was completely incapable anyway of successfully deceiving anybody when he did lie, had said nothing; but his silence and his evident misery had been more than sufficient to confirm the suspicions of Hypatius, who had promptly had him flogged. Rufus had broken down under the beating, and had told Hypatius that Cedonius was on his way to Portus. Rufus was so distressed while he was telling this part of his story to Cedonius that he found difficulty in

continuing. He was overcome by the enormity of his betrayal; but it did not occur to Cedonius to blame him. In an age when physical violence was the usual means of coercion, and especially among a slave population with no civil rights, no one blamed anyone else for the kind of weakness extreme pain brought out in nearly every man. In any case, Cedonius knew that it had been because he himself had played the runaway slave that Rufus had incurred Hypatius' anger, and had been beaten; and no man could be blamed for what he did or said under the lash. It took Cedonius some time to persuade Rufus not to blame himself. At another time Cedonius might have enjoyed Rufus' apologies; he might have taken a mild pleasure in rubbing in the other man's humiliation; but as it was, he was so pleased to see his friend and was so delighted with the food Rufus had brought him that he was more generous than he might otherwise have been. The two men talked together in whispers for about half an hour. Rufus did not dare to stay for long, though he promised that he would try to come back again another night. When he had gone, Cedonius went to sleep almost immediately, and slept soundly until the morning.

After that night Rufus came fairly regularly, although there were some nights when he was unable to do so. Cedonius began to rely on his friend's visits and to look forward to them as the brightest parts of an otherwise intolerable existence, and when Rufus did not come he felt cheated and miserable. Moreover, he missed the food Rufus brought him, for the diet at the mill was both meager and unappetizing; not that Rufus provided a feast each night, but even the small bits of fish or meat, which

he managed to bring, seemed like a banquet to Cedonius. When Cedonius had been there for about three weeks, Rufus told him that he and the other slaves of the household were trying to raise enough money between them to repay Hypatius the debt Cedonius owed him, and thus to secure his release.

"I didn't tell you before," he said, "because I didn't want to raise your hopes; but now it really looks as though we might succeed, and I can't resist telling you about it. We've raised more than three-quarters of what is needed. We only need a little more."

Cedonius did not know what to say. He was unused to being helped by his fellow slaves — on the contrary, they had always been in his debt — and he found it difficult to express gratitude to people whom he had always considered to be inferior to himself. But he was excited, and Rufus' news changed the whole tenor of life at the mill. In a way it made it worse; for to the ordinary discomforts and labors of the day there was now added a suspense that was almost unbearable. When he had known that his imprisonment was to last for two months, he had been able to tick off the days in his mind, keeping an exact account of how much longer there remained before the day of his release. Now everything had suddenly become uncertain, and he had no idea whether he would have to do another five weeks, five days, or five hours at the mill, and this made each hour more intolerable than ever. What kept him going was the thought of what he would do when he was released. But Hypatius was an unpredictable man, and when it occurred to Cedonius that perhaps Hypatius might take the money Rufus had collected and then re-

fuse to release him after all, he was shaken by great waves of anger and hatred. It would be typical of Hypatius to argue that since the money was owed to him it was his by right, but that since Cedonius' punishment was a consequence of his attempted flight his sentence to the mill could not be shortened. When Cedonius thought of this he was filled with rage at the injustice and cruelty of the social world in which he lived, and his resentment was concentrated upon Hypatius and upon Myonides the Jew; for these two men were the immediate cause of his present situation.

The strain of this suspense had to be alleviated somehow, and while he was moving round and round in the mill with the polished wooden spoke pressing into his groin, Cedonius spent most of the time constructing fantasies of revenge. His situation was so humiliating, and he was so completely helpless, that it was only in the creation of complicated and improbable dreams that he could bolster his own self-respect by imagining victories over those people who had been the cause of his downfall. For a time his hatred was concentrated upon Hypatius, but the fantasies in which Hypatius was degraded and humiliated in various ways were unsatisfying because of their extraordinary improbability. After all, with the whole weight of the law on his side Hypatius was, in fact, almost invulnerable, and the mere idea of a slave successfully revenging himself upon his master was too remote from the realm of reality to make even a satisfactory daydream. But in the case of Myonides the position was different; the Jew had put himself outside the law by absconding, and, if anything, he could expect even less help from so-

ciety than Cedonius himself. So Myonides gradually replaced Hypatius in the role of principal figure in Cedonius' plans and dreams. Most of these were absurd and impractical. They began by postulating a situation that no longer existed and took the form of imaginary events that might have happened if Cedonius had got wind of Myonides' intentions before the financier had put them into effect. But Cedonius had a rich imagination, and he did not brood over any one particular fantasy. When he had wrung the last drop of satisfaction out of one imaginary situation, others seemed to come into his mind of their own accord; and one of these eventually remained, because for the first time the idea was feasible and no longer patently absurd. It occurred to Cedonius that if he could trace Myonides and force him to pay his debt he might still be in a position to buy his freedom from Hypatius. Once his original debt had been paid by Rufus and the other slaves of the household, the money Myonides owed him should be sufficient to procure his liberty. The obvious difficulty in this plan was to think of a way of finding Myonides, but Cedonius did not think that this would be insuperable and he was in no state of mind to weigh difficulties in the balance; he was far more ready to believe that if a thing was intrinsically possible he would be able to do it. The plan had to succeed, and he, Cedonius, would simply make it do so.

The keystone of the arch upon which this castle in the air depended was the cohesion of the Jews as a race. On this the whole structure of the plan depended. Cedonius had had business dealings with the Jews for years, and he

knew quite well that unlike Greek or Latin merchants, who worked as individuals, the Jews always worked together. This was what made them so successful in the business world; and it was this, too, which made them so dangerous to deal with if you were not a Jew, for they behaved as if any method of beating a Gentile competitor was legitimate. Indeed, by their own moral standards, so it was. In view of all this, Cedonius was virtually certain that even if Myonides had succeeded in disappearing so completely that neither his creditors nor the police were able to discover his whereabouts, the Jewish community in Rome would know where the man was. So all that had to be done in order to trace him was to force the Jews to reveal the secret.

For two days Cedonius tried to think of a way of doing this. The trouble was that he no longer had any money, and without money nothing could be got from a Jew. In a thing such as this it would probably need a great deal of money, because even if a Jew could be found who would betray a member of his own race, he would do so only at a price. However, Cedonius could not get this plan out of his mind, and the more difficult it seemed of achievement the more obsessed he became with it. His state of mind was a compound of determination to wrest what he considered to be justice from an unjust world, of anger and injured pride at his humiliation, and of hatred of the man who had caused it. By the end of each day's work in the mill his whole head felt hot, and when he closed his eyes his eyelids seemed sore and swollen. He was like a man possessed; he could think of nothing else

but his plan. And it was while he was in this state of mind that he was released.

If Cedonius had been formidable before his imprisonment, he was doubly so now. He had undergone the kind of transformation that is sometimes experienced by a young soldier who goes away on his first campaign as a boy and returns from it as a man. The fire of adversity had forged a more dangerous Cedonius. Even Hypatius was a little frightened of him, for he no longer troubled to display his customary, if assumed, deference; instead, he answered almost harshly in monosyllables, and his eyes looked hard and cold. He was thinner and more muscular than he had been in the old days, and the lines round his mouth were deeper. Hypatius, who was not a vindictive man by nature, felt a little ashamed of the harshness with which he had treated Cedonius and, moreover, he was slightly alarmed by the effect this treatment had had upon the man. The last thing that he wanted to do was to lose the services of this talented and useful slave, and he was afraid that this might well be the outcome of his harshness. As a result, the two men found themselves in an absurd position: Hypatius, the master, was ingratiating—at times, almost effusively so—while Cedonius, the slave, was abrupt almost to the point of rudeness. The more Hypatius tried to soothe Cedonius' injured pride, the more contemptuous became Cedonius' manner. From the rest of the household, too, Cedonius kept aloof. While in a way he was grateful to them for having secured his release, he found it quite intolerable to be in their debt. What made it worse was that they never mentioned his obliga-

tion to them, treating him with even greater respect than before, as if to emphasize their confidence in him and their respect for him, and as if to show that neither of these things had been shaken by the disaster which had befallen him. Such servility disgusted Cedonius.

The only person with whom Cedonius talked was Rufus; the bond between them had been strengthened by recent events. So Cedonius confided in Rufus, and told him of his plan to trace Myonides. He did not do this with any idea that Rufus would be able to help, but simply because he could not bear to keep it entirely to himself; he had to talk about it to someone, and no one but Rufus was available.

Rufus, of course, was on principle opposed to any plan of revenge. He advised Cedonius to forget the whole thing and to let the matter drop. But Cedonius was not in the least interested in Rufus' advice. It was not for advice that he was seeking; it was for an audience. For, at last, he thought that he had hit upon a means of forcing the Jewish community in Rome to divulge Myonides' whereabouts. Although he knew that the Jews lied without hesitation if it suited them to do so in their business affairs, he thought that if he confronted them while they were gathered together in the Synagogue, he might be able to extract the truth from them.

"You can't trust them in ordinary everyday life," he said to Rufus. "I know that. But it will be more difficult for them to tell a downright lie in the Synagogue. I can challenge them on the ground of their own commandments."

"How do you mean, 'challenge them'?" Rufus asked.

"I don't see what you mean. How are you going to get into the place anyway? And when you are in, what can you possibly do?"

"That is the whole point," Cedonius said. "If I confront them with the direct question, 'Do you or don't you know where Myonides is?' they will be in a cleft stick — either they will have to tell me, or they will have to lie — and I don't believe that they will lie under those circumstances. After all, someone will have to act as their spokesman, and will he risk the loss of face involved in lying? I don't see how he could."

Rufus was not convinced. He did his utmost to dissuade Cedonius from attempting such a thing, for he himself was the kind of man who naturally distrusted activism in any shape or form. His own natural inclination was always to take things as they came, and to make the best of them. Because he was wholeheartedly Christian, this passive acceptance of whatever came was different from the cynical lassitude of many other slaves whose reactions were similar outwardly to his own; but where the latter accepted their lot with a hopeless and resigned indifference, Rufus always saw the hand of God in the order of the present moment, and accepted the course of events willingly. Apart from this, he took a more objective view of Cedonius' plan than did its author, and saw the difficulties that lay in the way of its success far more clearly than Cedonius could see them. He pointed out to his friend that the best he could hope for would be to be put out of the Synagogue, firmly but politely; whereas if things went badly he might easily find himself handed over to the authorities on a charge of breaking the peace. But Cedonius was incapable of

admitting even for a moment the possibility of failure; and the more the men argued, the more hardened each became in his point of view.

"I don't know why you can't accept things," Rufus said. "If you had accepted Myonides' disappearance in the first place and had come home instead of running away, you would have been in a far better position than you are now. After all, where did it get you? Into the treadmill. And now you are going to do just the same again. You're lucky to have got out of the mill as quickly as you did. Why can't you thank God for it, and give up this idea of the Synagogue? It isn't the will of God that you should be struggling all the time."

"I want to be free," Cedonius said.

"I don't know what you mean by 'free,'" Rufus replied. "What is freedom? You'll never be wholly free in this life. The only possible freedom is in abandonment to the will of God."

"And I suppose it is the will of God that this injustice and misery and slavery should continue?" Cedonius asked with a sarcastic twist of his mouth. "It is the will of God that men like Hypatius should spend their mean, self-centered lives talking of the love of the brethren while they are having them half flogged to death or shackled in the mill? And what about pagan households? Is it the will of God that his people should be slaves in such places, where they are not even allowed to marry one another? And then that a man who lies with a girl should be accused by the Church of adultery and should be cut off from forgiveness for ever? One must accept all that? Is that the kind of thing which you call the will of God? Or

should a Christian use the talents and the brains and the strength that God has given him to better himself, if he can?"

Rufus knew that further argument would be useless. Anyway, he was no good at arguing; his mind always seemed to become emptier and emptier as his agitation increased, and it was only in retrospect that he could think of all the things he ought to have said which had not occurred to him at the time. He tried to remember a quotation that was hovering at the back of his mind. He knew it to be apposite, but could not recall it. He knew that it was something about the strength of God being made perfect in weakness; that was as far as he could get. He was doubly miserable, because he still felt guilty of having betrayed Cedonius' flight to Hypatius in the first place. It was to make amends for this that — despite his lack of faith in Cedonius' plan — in the end he told him he would go with him if he insisted upon going to the Synagogue. He had allowed his friend to go to Portus alone, and somehow he felt that if he accompanied him this time he would be able to blot out the memory of that first desertion.

It was two days later, on a Saturday, that Cedonius set out for the Synagogue. The very hot weather had been broken by a storm during the previous night, and it was raining. The streets were wet and steaming, and the houses were blotched and squalid with rain. Scraps of sodden rags, vegetable leaves, and refuse had choked most of the rather inadequate drains, and there were places where the water lay in great puddles right across the road. Animals and

men splashed and slithered as they walked, and the air was filled with a faint smell of sewage, as if the low woolly clouds, like sodden fleece, had trapped all the smells of the city under a blanket. It was nearly two miles from Hypatius' house to the Synagogue. As they walked Rufus was nervous and depressed. He kept wiping the rain from his face with his hand, and he was sweating too, for the air was as hot as that in a laundry. He noticed that Cedonius' short dark hair was sticking to his forehead in damp curls and his wet skin was as brown as coffee, but he seemed to be oblivious of the discomfort of the weather and unwilling to talk, so they walked in silence.

Their arrival at the Synagogue was well timed. People were moving in through the doors in groups of two and three, talking to one another. Judaism was not only a licit religion but rather a fashionable one, and by no means all its adherents were Jewish by race. It had won many proselytes, the majority of whom were neither proletarian nor aristocratic but from the middle-class business world. On the whole they were men who had become disillusioned by the bankruptcy and the moral degeneracy of the old indigenous faith of Rome and had found something better with the Jews. But this was not the whole story, for it was a distinct advantage for a businessman to embrace Judaism, and many of its most nationalist and exclusivist tenets, which might have repulsed those of Gentile birth, had been allowed to sink into obscurity in the synagogues of the dispersion. Even those people who were Jewish by birth had been so assimilated into the civilization in whose midst they had lived all their lives that if they had been given the opportunity of returning to Judea most of

them would not have desired to do so. So it was easy for Cedonius and Rufus to mingle with the cosmopolitan crowd of worshippers who were entering the Synagogue, for no one noticed the presence of strangers. The flagstones just inside the door had been made wet and muddy by the feet of the crowd, and the building was filled with a warm, slightly unpleasant smell of damp clothing. Rufus and Cedonius found a place at the back of the hall near the door. By the time they arrived, it was already nearly full, and they had little room to move in the press of men around them. Cedonius looked round, trying to see faces he could recognize. There were one or two men whom he had occasionally come across in business, and he nudged Rufus when a middle-aged man with a wiry gray beard came in through the door. It was the Rabbi, Marcellus, who was by marriage a relative of Myonides. Rufus, who was too small to see over the heads of the men around him, only caught a glimpse of Marcellus as he made his way up the hall.

The proceedings were a peculiar mixture of the familiar and the unfamiliar, for in many ways it was extremely like a Christian service, while in others it was quite different. To Rufus it was rather like a nightmare; just as he began to feel that he knew what was coming next something wholly unexpected would happen instead, as though the whole thing were an inconsequential dream. The service was extremely long. It dragged on, slowly and partly unintelligibly, through prayers, psalms, a long and boring homily, and various readings from the Scriptures; and it was at the conclusion of the second of these readings that Cedonius acted.

The Rabbi Marcellus, facing the congregation and holding an enormous scroll in his hands, was the reader. He spoke in a high nasal monotone affected for the occasion; it was a kind of incantation. Toward the end there was a reference to the Mosaic Law, and this provided Cedonius with just the opportunity he wanted. The hall was not exactly silent, for there was a certain amount of coughing and fidgeting in the crowd, but it was silent enough for Cedonius' interruption to sound dramatic. Loudly and clearly he called across the heads of the crowd, "What is the Law, Marcellus?"

Heads were turned, and there was a rustle of movement among the assembled men. Marcellus stopped in surprise and looked vaguely over the heads of the congregation in Cedonius' direction, as though uncertain what to do; after a moment of hesitation he seemed to decide that it would be advisable to ignore the interruption, and he continued to read. But Cedonius had no intention of being ignored; he raised his voice again and shouted, "'Thou shalt not steal.' Is that the Law?"

This time there was complete silence, and everyone turned to look at Cedonius.

"That's the Law, isn't it?" he said, speaking over the heads of the crowd to Marcellus. "And didn't Moses say, 'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor? You interpret the Law here. What should one do to a thief and a liar, Marcellus?"

There was an embarrassed silence of astonishment, but — as yet — there was no active hostility. Marcellus was obviously at a loss to know how to deal with this turn of events. It was not the nature of the question in itself

which worried him, but its timing, for he was unused to being interrupted in the middle of his formal religious observances. Rufus, looking up at Cedonius by his side, saw that he was slightly flushed with excitement; his hands were trembling a little; his nostrils were dilated; and he was breathing more quickly than usual.

"If you respect this Law of yours," Cedonius shouted, his voice a little harsher and more raucous than before, "tell me where the liar and thief, Myonides, has gone. He is your kinsman, Marcellus."

Marcellus looked up quickly, and replied, "This Law of *mine*? Isn't it your Law too?"

The flush on Cedonius' cheeks spread upward to his eyes.

"Never mind that," he shouted. "Are you or aren't you going to abide by the Law? Myonides is a thief. If you respect the Law, tell me where he is, and let him pay the penalty of what he has done."

A small sandy-haired Jew with a thin, sharp nose and eyes set close together at the top of it, who was standing by the north wall of the Synagogue, shouted over the heads of the crowd at Cedonius, "Who are you to ask such questions? Answer the Rabbi."

Marcellus had been adroit. The crowd of men were no longer merely surprised and neutral; the suspicion of Cedonius' orthodoxy which Marcellus had managed to sow in their minds had germinated, and was beginning to grow into hostility. For a moment there was a general buzz of angry conversation, and Marcellus, who was trying to say something, was not able to make himself heard. The men nearest to Cedonius and Rufus had turned toward them, and were standing round them in a tight circle.

When the noise had subsided a little, Marcellus called for silence and all conversation stopped.

Obviously feeling master of the situation for the first time, he looked across at Cedonius and said, "That was good advice you were given. Why don't you answer my first question? Are you a Jew or aren't you? And if you are, why do you refer to *my* Law?"

As though something had suddenly occurred to him, he lifted his head quickly, and added, "Perhaps you're a Christian. Is that it?"

It was a disastrously accurate guess, and it was taken up immediately by the crowd, who began to shout and to press toward Cedonius. Cedonius' cry of "Never mind that. Answer my question. Where is Myonides?" was drowned by the noise of the crowd, and almost before he had finished speaking one of the men standing nearest to him spat at him. The room was filled with cries of, "Christian!" Cedonius began to push through the crowd in the direction of the main doorway, but one of the men standing behind him put out his foot, and tried to trip him up. Cedonius stumbled but kept his balance. Red with anger, he turned toward the man who had tripped him and hit him on the side of the head with a blow like that of a sledge hammer. The man collapsed as though he had been pole-axed, but before his body reached the floor Cedonius was attacked on all sides.

Two hours later, Cedonius and Rufus were lying in a small cell adjoining the Magistrate's Court awaiting trial on the capital charge of Christianity. The outcome of the fight in the Synagogue had never been in doubt. Rufus

had joined Cedonius, but two men were no match for two hundred. Because he was smaller than Cedonius, Rufus had gone down almost at once under the rush of their opponents, and he had been less badly hurt in consequence. Cedonius had fought with the ferocity of an animal, biting, kicking, scratching, and hitting in every direction, and he had lasted a surprisingly long time; but even so it had only been a matter of minutes before he had been forced to the ground, where he had been battered and kicked into unconsciousness. The affair might not have ended there, for the Jews felt a bitter and long-standing hatred of all Christians, and Cedonius' ferocity had aroused their fury. They might have pushed things to the point of killing the two of them if Marcellus had not exerted his authority and prevented them from doing so. Marcellus' motives for restraining the crowd were mixed; in part, since he was a humane man, he genuinely wished to avoid bloodshed; but in addition to this it would have been foolish to have stood by while the two men were killed, for there would have been no way of proving to the authorities that they had been Christians, and the Jews would have found themselves with a charge of murder on their hands. This would have been doubly foolish in view of the fact that the authorities would almost certainly condemn the two men to death if they were given in charge. So eventually Marcellus had succeeded in frustrating the intention of the crowd to lynch the two men.

Cedonius lay on the floor of the cell, while Rufus, kneeling beside him, moistened the skirt of his tunic with spittle and wiped the blood from Cedonius' face. Rufus

worked in silence, for he was extremely frightened, and he was praying as hard as he could in a rather incoherent way. He was praying for courage during the next few hours: courage to bear whatever was coming to him; courage not to deny the faith; courage to do what he wanted to do more than anything else on earth — to endure pain as Christ had endured pain. But he knew that he had no courage. All his life he had been timid to the point of cowardice, and courage was to him a wholly unknown quality. Although he knew that he could do nothing by his own efforts, he kept repeating to himself "God will help me. God will help me," like a hypnotized rabbit. Cedonius, who had only just recovered consciousness, opened his left eye — the other was completely closed, swollen, and bleeding from a cut that ran down his forehead to his eyelid — and said, "I'm sorry, Rufus."

Rufus made little clucking noises like a nurse with a child, and began to cry a little as he wiped the blood from Cedonius' forehead and smoothed the hair back from the wound with his other hand.

"If it hadn't been for me, you would never have been here," Cedonius said, licking his swollen lips painfully. "I shouldn't have let you come with me. You said from the beginning that it wouldn't work."

They relapsed into silence, and for about twenty minutes Rufus continued to wipe Cedonius' face. Even when the bleeding had stopped and his ministrations were no longer necessary, he went on mechanically wiping, without thinking what he was doing. When he stopped, he went and sat back against the wall of the cell, smooth-

ing out the hem of his tunic where it was wet and brown with Cedonius' blood, as though somehow it was important to remove the creases from it.

He had an incorrigible habit of interlarding his speech with quotations, and as if answering Cedonius' last remark he said, "To them that love God all things work together for good.'"

Cedonius put his hands behind his head. Without opening his eyes, he said, "What do you mean?"

"About being here with you," Rufus replied. "I mean that if it had not been God's will for me to be here, I suppose I should not have been here; but since I am here, it must be his will. It's not your fault. But we mustn't betray the others; they are bound to ask us about them."

Cedonius opened his left eye and looked at the ceiling. The rain had stopped, and a beam of sunlight was shining into the cell through a small window high up near the roof. The dust floated and shone in the bar that it made, making it look blue and solid. He closed his eye again. This aspect of the thing had not occurred to him. He had realized that he and Rufus would be charged with Christianity and faced with the question, "Are you a Christian?"; but the idea that they might also be asked to give information about other Christians had not entered his head. It might even be dangerous to tell the court where they worked, for the police would probably raid Hypatius' house as a result. Cedonius was not perturbed by the thought of what might happen to Hypatius — in fact, for a moment, he played with the idea of betraying him as a revenge — but it was essential to avoid casting

suspicion on the rest of the household. Then there were the meetings in Collatinus' house. It was inevitable that the authorities would ask for information about them, for the State's favorite method of striking a blow at the Church was to raid one of the meeting places and arrest all those who were present; and although for long periods of time the anti-Christian laws were left in abeyance, there was no knowing when such a period was going to end and give way to one of active hostility and rigorous application of the law. If a chance were to present itself of closing down one of the Christian meeting places, it might become a prelude to a revival of persecution.

Cedonius passed his tongue over his swollen lips. They were rough and tasted of salt. He bent his legs, and shifted the weight of his body on to his right side, turning over slowly and carefully. The prospect of the next few hours frightened him. To plead guilty seemed to be not only terrifying but also futile, whereas to deny the charge would be easy; he had only to burn a pinch of incense in front of the Emperor's portrait and he would be allowed to go free, for the accusation brought against him by the Jews would carry no weight in the face of such an action. It would be so simple and it was so obviously the sensible thing to do that Cedonius was surprised to find himself feeling guilty at the thought of apostasy. After all, what possible good could come of his death? It was absurd to suppose that a kind of heroic suicide on his part, in deference to a mere scruple, could possibly benefit God; and he was not at all sure that the scruple was a very worthy one, for his reluctance to deny his faith arose far more from a fear of losing face than from any loyalty to God

or the Church. To preserve his life and to devote it to the service of his fellow Christians would be incomparably better than to sacrifice it unprofitably and ignominiously. He knew his own talents well enough to be sure that if he lived he would be able to achieve something better than a moment's blind, bigoted, and senseless courage. It would be a criminal waste to throw away his life in such an idiotic way.

He looked across at Rufus, who was sitting against the wall with his head thrown back and his eyes closed. His sandy hair was clotted with blood in one place where he had been kicked during the fight in the Synagogue, and his mean little body in the torn and blood-stained tunic looked ridiculously ignoble. Rufus was a typical and quite insignificant slave. Cedonius wanted to talk to him of the absurdity of dying rather than burning a pinch of incense, but he knew that the other man would not understand. For a moment, all his old feelings of contempt for Rufus' apathetic servility revived, and he almost disliked him. Rufus was so conditioned by a life of slavery that he would probably take a perverted and unpleasant pleasure in the thought of martyrdom. Indeed, the enemies of Christianity constantly accused it of being a slaves' religion, in which there was no room for self-respecting people and no place for men and women who took a proper pride in themselves.

Rufus opened his eyes and smiled at him.

"Don't look so worried, Cedonius," he said. "I know what you're thinking, but don't worry. I shan't disgrace you. God will give me courage, when the time comes. I'm

not like you. I can't help being frightened."

Cedonius did not reply. He turned his head away from Rufus, and looked at the ceiling.

The day dragged on with the intolerable slowness inherent in a time of anxiety and fear. It seemed incredible that any one day could possibly last so long. At intervals a face appeared behind the bars of a small grille in the door as a guard looked in at the two prisoners. Sometime in the early afternoon, the man opened the door with a great jangling of keys, and brought in a metal bowl filled with a kind of cold stew. There was a bench in one corner of the room near the door, and he banged the bowl of food down onto it, saying, "There you are. You'd better eat, the two of you. It will cheer you up." He neither smiled as he said it nor did he show any signs of hostility; his attitude was neutral. He was so accustomed to the sight of prisoners that they did not affect him either way. It did not arouse his sympathy or his dislike. He looked at them, as he would have looked at the furniture of the cells. As far as their feelings and their fate were concerned, they were not his concern.

As the man turned to go, Cedonius asked him how long they were likely to be left in the cell before trial.

"You won't be brought up today," the guard replied without bothering to turn his head. "The Prefect doesn't come in again until tomorrow morning."

"Shall we be tried then?" Cedonius asked.

"You may be," he said. "How am I to know? I'm not the Prefect, am I?"

He banged the door and locked it.

The rest of the day seemed interminable, but it was not as bad as the night that followed. Shortly before dusk the guard again brought them some food and water, but this time he said nothing, although once more Cedonius asked him how long they would have to wait for their trial. The man was whistling through his teeth, and he did not even bother to stop. He banged the food down on the bench as before, and went out of the cell, still whistling.

Conversation seemed pointless, and as it became dark, the two men lay in silence. The cell was damp after the rain, and it was cold lying on the floor. Cedonius grew stiff, and his bruises and cuts ached unbearably. It must have become cloudy again outside, for no light came in through the small window. There was a rat somewhere, and the little thuds of its soft body colliding with various obstacles as it scuttled about in the darkness woke Cedonius on the only two occasions when he managed to drop into a restless sleep. But sleep was almost impossible. He was preoccupied with the choice with which he would be faced during the next day: death or a pinch of incense — a senseless and an idiotic end, or lip service to the Emperor and a life useful to his fellow men. These things revolved in his mind like a merry-go-round. Each time that he decided firmly and finally to take the sensible course, he was overcome by panic at the thought of the loss of face it would involve and the ignominy of being dubbed an apostate; but each time that he contemplated the insane alternative of signing his own death warrant by admitting that he was a Christian, an even greater panic overcame him and he began to sweat all over his body.

He wondered if Rufus was experiencing a similar agony of indecision. Although he did not speak to him, he knew that the other man was not asleep, for he could hear him fidgeting and changing his position. In the end, Cedonius slept for an hour or two, although he was surprised when he found that he had done so.

The sun was shining when he awoke, and as far as he could judge by the angle of its entry through the window of the cell, it must have been up for about three hours. He looked across at Rufus. The little man had collapsed at the foot of the wall and was asleep. He looked more like a bundle of rags than a human being. There was some bread left over from the previous evening, and Cedonius, who was hungry, got up from the floor to fetch it. He was so stiff and bruised, and his joints ached so much after lying on the stone floor of the cell all night, that he almost cried out as he moved. He stretched his arms cautiously, and began to flex his muscles, bending and straightening his legs and twisting his body from one side to another. As he moved across the floor to get the bread, Rufus sat up, running his hands through his hair and stretching his stringy little neck. They shared the bread between them, and talked to each other as if the day that had just begun was no different from any other day. Rufus said that he had slept quite well, and Cedonius remarked that the break in the weather seemed to be over. When they had eaten all the food in the cell, Rufus poured a little water into Cedonius' cupped hands so that he might wash his face, and while Cedonius was performing the same service for Rufus, there was a jangling of keys and the

door of the cell was thrown open with a crash. The guard of the night before came in and said, "Come on, you two! You're first on the list this morning."

L. Gaius Fuscianus, Prefect of Rome in the nine hundred and forty-first year of the founding of the city, which was the year 187 of the Christian era, was a typical member of the ruling class. Aged about fifty, he was an able if unimaginative man whose whole background, environment, and early training had cast him in an impressive mold. By his own lights he was an upright man, but self-opinionated and narrow, and blind to the existence of lights other than his own. Roman conventions, Roman standards, Roman ideals, and Roman shibboleths were things he never questioned. It was not so much that they were the best of their kind as that there were no others. Similarly, he took it completely for granted that the Roman ruling class existed in order to rule; by a dispensation of providence — or, perhaps rather, by a law of nature — men born in the ruling class were *ipso facto* superior to all others, and it was their job to maintain the social *status quo*. Anything that threatened the existing structure of society was an evil, and as such it must be extirpated. The two greatest menaces to the supremacy of Rome in this latter half of the second century were internal ones. In the old days, the barbarians on the frontiers of the Empire had sometimes menaced its security, but now it seemed to Fuscianus that the two evils of a discontented and rebellious population of slaves on the one hand and the insidious growth of exotic religions, which had crept into the Empire from the East, on the other, were

poisoning it at the heart. As he looked with distaste at the two prisoners in the dock before him, they seemed to him to epitomize both these evils and to represent the two most unpleasant aspects of the slave population: one of them was mean, physically despicable, and servile, while the other — more dangerous than his companion — was the kind of overweening and aggressive product of the slums which was becoming all too common. Over and above this, they were Christians — at least, they were accused of being Christians — and Fuscianus always felt depressed whenever a Christian appeared before him, for each new batch provided further evidence of the insidious way in which this poisonous thing, Christianity, was spreading like a cancer in the body politic. Nowadays, you could never tell what these Christians were going to be like. There was evidence that even some of the aristocratic and educated classes were falling victims to this particular superstition, which was eating away the heart of the Empire and demoralizing its spirit. He sighed, and called the court to order.

When the accusation against Cedonius and Rufus had been read by the clerk of the court, the Rabbi Marcellus was called upon to give evidence. He came into the court looking impressive and dignified in a long black robe, with his head held a little to one side and with an expression of decorous gravity on his face. While he was speaking he kept his eyes on the Prefect. He was an admirable witness; he gave just the right impression of being a man who spoke the truth, plainly and honestly, while greatly respecting the court to which he was addressing himself. Briefly he described how the two accused men had deliberately

caused a disturbance in the Synagogue during the time of public worship, and he gave it as his opinion that they had caused this disturbance because they were Christians and, therefore, anti-Jewish. In support of this contention he pointed out that the two men had shown some knowledge of the Jewish scriptures; and it was well known that the Christian Church used the Jewish sacred writings in their own worship.

While Marcellus was giving his evidence, Cedonius noticed that Rufus was trembling a little, and that his hands were gripping the rail of the dock so tightly that his knuckles were white. He wondered if Rufus had decided what he was going to say when he was faced with the inevitable question; he, Cedonius, for almost the first time in his life, was in a state of complete indecision. However much he despised the absurd scruple at the back of his mind which made it intolerably difficult to follow the sane and intelligent course of denying the charge of Christianity, he seemed unable either to uproot or to suppress it; and yet every impulse of sanity and every prompting of intelligence made him rebel at the senselessness of the alternative. He didn't know what he was going to say when he was asked whether he was a Christian or not—and the moment was almost upon him. He had never experienced quite the same feeling of panic as that which mounted in him now. He could hear the blood pounding in his head, and his neck felt hot and swollen, so that he had difficulty in swallowing; his mouth was dry, and his tongue was sore. He was in such a confused state of mind that it was only after Fuscianus had begun to speak when he realized the Prefect was addressing the prisoners. In

the precise and rather old-fashioned Latin of a lawyer and with the distinctive accent of the upper class, Fuscianus explained that he was not concerned, for the moment, with the disturbance of the peace in the Synagogue.

"It is evident that you have been guilty of disturbing the peace," he said, "but since you are not accused of this offense, it does not concern this court. Therefore the observations made by the last witness upon your conduct in this respect are irrelevant to the matter in hand. Instead, you are accused of the more serious offense of being members of an illegal organization — namely, the Christian Church — and the fact that your accuser has made this allegation against you as a deduction from your behavior in the Synagogue is neither here nor there. You will, therefore, confine yourselves, as is customary in such cases as this, to admitting or denying the crime of Christianity, with which you are charged. I do not want to hear long explanations of your conduct in the recent affray in the Synagogue. Is that quite clear?"

Allowing no time for an answer to this rhetorical question, Fuscianus embarked at once upon a long and pedantically phrased summary of the law that proscribed Christianity. When he had finished, he looked in the direction of the dock and said, "It is now your duty to answer the following question: Are you Christian?"

It was curiously phrased. When more than one person was in the dock, the usual procedure was to direct the question to each man in turn; but this time Fuscianus, for no apparent reason, put his question in this generalized way. The result was that for a moment Rufus and Cedomius looked at each other as if each of them expected

the other to speak first, not knowing which of them was expected to reply. Their confusion was only momentary but, as it happened, it made an extraordinary difference to the outcome of the trial, which might have taken a very different course if Fuscianus had been more precise in his manner of address. For, as Cedonius opened his mouth to speak, Rufus replied, "Yes, I am."

Cedonius suddenly felt as if the room were spinning round him. He thought that he was going to faint, and before he had recovered Fuscianus turned to him, saying, "And you?" He heard his own voice — except that it hardly sounded like his own voice — saying automatically, "Yes, I am," like a mechanical echo of the voice of Rufus.

During the rest of the proceedings, Cedonius behaved more like an idiot or a drunken man than anything else. He was capable neither of listening to the questions, nor of giving rational replies. As a result, it fell to Rufus to bear the brunt of a long and detailed interrogation. He was asked to tell the court where he and Cedonius worked, and whether they came from a Christian household or not. Then there were endless questions about the Christian meeting places, the identity of the Christian priests, and the addresses of any other Christians he knew. But to all these questions Rufus replied, "I am sorry. I cannot say."

Fuscianus did not lose his temper — he was both too good a lawyer and too experienced a magistrate to do that; but the fantastic obstinacy of these Christians never ceased to irritate him and to amaze him. It was nearly always the same with these people; with very few exceptions, they stood in the dock like idiotic sheep and flatly refused to

say anything in spite of threats and repeated warnings about the consequences of their silence. Perhaps the most exasperating feature of their behavior was the unhealthy pleasure that they seemed to take in enduring torture, and even in dying, rather than behaving like rational human beings. Fuscianus was only too well aware of the fact that it was just this characteristic which made them so dangerous. Most other kinds of criminals could be intimidated by the law, and the condemnation of one would serve as a deterrent to others of his kind. But these Christians were more like vicious weeds in a well-kept lawn; when one was rooted up, ten others took its place. Recently Fuscianus had begun to think that the official policy of destroying these people was mistaken in its tactics. It had been applied with varying degrees of severity for more than a century and yet it did not seem to have succeeded in even checking the growth of Christianity, let alone in wiping it out. It was well known that the deaths of individual Christians were acclaimed by their fellows as triumphs, and to Fuscianus, therefore, it seemed stupid to condemn a few small fry to death, if in so doing those who had not fallen into the net of the law were actually encouraged rather than deterred by the spectacle of their fellows' fate. Since ordinary methods of social discipline had proved themselves ineffective, the State, if it wished to eradicate Christianity, would have to resort to other means.

With these considerations in mind, and realizing that any further interrogation of the two men before him would be a waste of time, Fuscianus made up his mind to end the trial and to sentence the prisoners.

"You have pleaded guilty," he said, "and you have shown by your behavior in this court that you are not only guilty but quite unrepentant. You know the legal penalty you have incurred as well as I do. It is within my power to sentence you to death, and I wish to make it perfectly clear that although I did not make the law I consider it to be just. You live in our midst, availing yourselves of all the advantages of our society, while, like the parasites that you are, you suck its very life blood. You deny its most cherished ideals; you pay no homage to the gods; you are traitors to the Emperor; you have imported bestial and slavish habits from the East, while you live under our protection and eat our salt. The only treatment such conduct deserves is elimination. However, it appears you imagine that by dying you can become heroes, and I am going to deny you this satisfaction. If you wish to appear in the role of heroes, I shall not help you to do so. Instead, I sentence you both to penal servitude for life in the mines of Sardinia. Take them away."

As Cedonius and Rufus were led from the court, Fuscianus blew his nose in an irritated way and turned to his books in order to discover the nature of the next case on the list. He knew that he would be in a bad temper for the rest of the day.

PART II

C ONVICTS WHO WERE sentenced to imprisonment in Sardinia were embarked at Portus. Cedonius found it difficult to believe that it was less than a month since he had been on another ship within a few yards of where he now lay, battened down under hatches in the company of about thirty other condemned men. They were in the hold of a small sailing vessel. He and Rufus were the only Christians. The other men had been convicted of various crimes: there were petty thieves; two captured bandits; a baker who had failed to pay his debts; a big youth of nineteen who had tried to evade his military service by hiding in a haystack on his father's farm when a recruiting officer had arrived; a pimp who for some minor fault had beaten one of the girls in his employ a little too hard one night, and had killed her; and a number of other men who had fallen foul of the law in one way or another. The weather was as hot as ever, and as the sun beat down upon the ship, the confined space into which the convicts were crowded became as hot as an oven. Although there were no portholes, it was not quite dark — a little light

came through the ill-fitting joints of the hatches above their heads. The ship was regularly used to transport convicts from the mainland to Sardinia. Since the prisoners were kept permanently locked below decks during the seven- to ten-day journey, and the hold was seldom cleaned, the filth was indescribable. The stench was so appalling that most of the men were sick before they had been there for half an hour. An iron drum was provided as a lavatory, but it was wholly inadequate, and the water in the bilge was filled with sewage.

Cedonius and Rufus had been there for about two hours; they had been brought from Rome with fifteen other men. The rest were local convicts, who had been aboard since the previous day. There was little conversation. Cedonius and Rufus had found places for themselves in a narrow space between two of the large timbers of the prow, where they were separated from the other men, most of whom had secured places at the other end of the hold nearer to the center of the ship. During the course of the journey from Rome to Portus the convicts had talked among themselves, and had discussed the reasons for their various convictions. When it had become known that Cedonius and Rufus had been sentenced for Christianity, the pimp had become hostile and abusive. He was a handsome man of about forty-five with the blue eyes and the auburn hair of a northern Italian. He looked both charming and attractive; in fact, he was vain, hard, ruthless, and dominating, and being older than most of the others, he soon made it plain that he intended to be respected. The other men, who might not have been hostile to Cedonius and Rufus simply because of their Chris-

tianity, followed his lead like sheep, and since their arrival in Portus and their embarkation, the pimp had succeeded in imposing his opinion upon the batch of prisoners, already in the ship, so effectively that Cedonius and Rufus attracted the almost unanimous hostility and abuse of their fellow passengers; no epithet was too bad to apply to them, and no trick too mean to play upon them.

They sailed on the evening breeze which always blew from the shore. Neither Rufus nor Cedonius slept at all that night. Some of the planks over the scuppers were broken, and it was impossible to lie down without getting wet with filth, as the ship rolled. If they dozed, an arm or a leg would suddenly drop into the water beneath them. So, in the end, they spent most of the night huddled together, wedged between the two timbers in the prow.

Once a day, the main hatch was opened, and a guard lowered a large bucket of food on a rope into the hold. Each man had a small iron bowl, and this he filled from the bucket; those who got there first came away with their bowls full and slopping over, but those who got there last often found the bucket nearly empty. The pimp would go round among the other men at the time when the food bucket was expected, whispering and laughing and making sure that when the food arrived everyone would co-operate to prevent Cedonius and Rufus from reaching the bucket, so that they were always the last to be served. On the third day of the voyage things came to a head. Cedonius and Rufus, as usual, were the last to dip their bowls into the bucket. As they were walking back to their places in the prow, the pimp raised his foot and kicked the bowl from Rufus' hand, upsetting its contents into the

ordure and the bilge. There was a shout of laughter, but it did not last long. Cedonius lost his temper, and, white and shaking with rage, he turned to the man with his hand raised to strike him. Rufus, who detested violence, grabbed Cedonius' arm, and shouted, "No! Don't, Cedonius!" Cedonius hesitated just long enough to allow the pimp to move away out of reach. He dropped his arm to his side, and in a voice that was all the more menacing for being quiet he said, "The next time you try anything like that, I shall kill you."

The convicts were standing round the two men in a circle, crowded and silent. Indeed, they were so silent that the only noise which could be heard was the lapping of the bilge water beneath their feet and the slow creaking of the ship's timbers. The guard, who had watched the whole incident from the open hatch above, shouted down to Cedonius, "It's not a bad idea. It would save a lot of trouble if we could write 'died at sea' against that one's name on our list. He's a dead loss even as cargo." When he had pulled up the empty food bucket on its rope, the guard banged the hatch down and fastened it in place. For a moment Cedonius stood where he was, facing the pimp, with the others still standing round them in silence. When he turned away, and moved across to his place in the prow, the convicts stepped aside to make way for him. The incident was closed.

After that Cedonius and Rufus were left severely alone, and the voyage proceeded uneventfully. The men did not get used to the conditions in which they were forced to live, for they were too bad for that, but it was possible to come to terms with the squalor in the hold, and they de-

vised means of surviving it. Cedonius and Rufus became so expert at wedging themselves together between the timbers of the prow that they did not fall into the filth below when they went to sleep. They did not sleep well — that was out of the question — but they managed to sleep a little. Toward the end of the voyage, they ran into rough weather, and the ship rolled and pitched in the short, choppy Mediterranean waves. Many of the convicts were prostrated with seasickness, and the hold was filled with the noise of retching and the stench of vomit. Rufus, too, was sick. Cedonius did his best to make the little man comfortable, but there was very little that he could do; the most that he could manage was to prevent Rufus from falling into the bilge, in which, now that the movement of the ship was more violent than before, a great malodorous tide sluiced up and down, splashing up through the planks above it. But the wind, which was roughening the sea, was also carrying the ship to its destination more quickly than would have been the case in calm weather, and they docked at Carales on the ninth day out from Portus. Many of the men were so exhausted by seasickness that when the ship entered the still water of the harbor they slept where they lay, their limbs trailing in the filth.

Sardinia was very different from the mainland. For one thing, it was used as a kind of social refuse heap upon which to tip those elements of Roman society as were objectionable to the government. For another thing, it was a colony, and the indigenous population of the island resented its subjection to Rome. The local tribes had obstinately refused to succumb to the process of Romanization to which all the conquered peoples of the Empire were subjected,

and they took every opportunity presented for making trouble. Open rebellion had often broken out in the past, and although each successive insurrection had been put down by the legions, the Sardinians never seemed to learn the lesson of their own impotence. While the flat agricultural country near Carales was fairly easy to control, the mountainous interior was more difficult, and it was never quiet for long. The hills were infested by bands of brigands who plundered the peasantry and the Roman landlords of the corn-growing lowlands alike, and kept the military authorities permanently on the alert. Life was neither stable nor safe in Sardinia. It was a microcosm of a society built on the foundation of a subjugated slave population and upheld by force.

The convicts were left in the hold of the ship until late in the afternoon of the day of docking. Just before dark the main hatch was opened, and a rope ladder was lowered into the hold. One by one the men climbed up to the deck, and as they emerged into the fresh air a party of soldiers under the command of a centurion herded them into the bows of the ship, where they were guarded as though they were dangerous animals.

Cedonius could hardly believe that the air could smell so delicious; after the stench of the hold each breath was like a draught of wine, drenching his lungs with the coolness of the evening. The fresh salty tang of the sea was laced with the smell of warm brick, a whiff of wood smoke, and the faint resinous smell of the trees behind the town; somewhere, too, there was the heavy scent of carnations. He breathed as a drunkard drinks, in deep intoxicating

draughts, savoring the air, pulling it into his lungs greedily as though he had not breathed for a fortnight. As he did so, he looked at the town. The quay was lit by a row of torches, their flames orange against the fading apricot of a dying sky. There were lights in the windows of the houses, which huddled together like children's square bricks round the harbor. Built at the foot of a long narrow hill, it was not much of a town. Severely practical, it consisted of a few shops, some brothels for the troops and the sailors, and the small white-washed houses of the local fishermen and tradesmen. In the distance to the north, the hills stood up against the sky in a wavy dark blue mass, while nearer at hand the foothills were blotched and speckled with the black tadpole shapes of cypress trees and the rounder umbrella pines. The evening air, as still as a pool of milk, was filled with ripples of sound: the braying of a donkey; the noise of the waves breaking outside the harbor; and the noise of singing as parties of soldiers on evening leave from their camps roamed the town, whistling at the women and getting drunk on the local brandy.

When the last man had climbed out of the hold and they were all standing together in the bows, two of the soldiers began to manacle their wrists and to pass a chain through a ring on each pair of manacles, so that the thirty men were linked loosely together. There were a few bored spectators as they were shepherded down the gangway on to the cobbled quay, but the arrival of a party of convicts in Sardinia was too common an occurrence to draw a crowd or to arouse much interest. Cedonius was manacled to Rufus, who still looked ill from seasickness, and the two

men marched next to each other through the warm narrow streets of the town. It was nearly dark by the time they reached the town wall, and there was a short delay while the gates were opened for them, for they were closed at sundown. Outside, close to the road, like a symbol of the Roman Empire, there was a cluster of some thirty crosses with the bodies of men hanging from them. These were bandits who had been caught and crucified during the previous week. Half a dozen crows flapped lazily into the air from the branches of the dark little grove, where they had been feeding on the dead fruit which it provided. Slow, black, and ungainly, they rose into the fading sky, while beneath them in the twilight a breath of evening breeze rustled and sighed, stirring a wisp of hair here, moving a fragment of tattered rag there, and setting some fingerbones tapping together in its passage. Three dogs crouched, gray and indistinct in the half light, and looked up, snarling, their hackles up, as the convicts passed by. Cedonius noticed that the feet of most of the crucified men had been eaten and gnawed; the legs of some had been picked clean as high as the knee.

As they moved off, some of the men talked together in low voices, but for the most part they marched in a silence only broken by the sound of their bare feet shuffling along in the dust of the road and by the clanking of the chain that linked them together. From time to time Cedonius asked Rufus how he was feeling, for he was worried about the little man's health. In answering, Rufus always reassured him. It was a new experience for Cedonius to be worried about anyone but himself; he had grown genuinely

fond of Rufus during the past few weeks. When it was dark, the sky was frothy with a foam of stars, and the night air was filled with the hollow croaking of frogs and the high incessant whine of mosquitoes.

They reached the prison camp about midnight and were kept waiting in the dark for nearly an hour before their names were taken by a fat man, who was annoyed at being wakened at that hour of the night. Then they were divided into two parties and herded into two separate huts. Rufus and Cedonius were in the same party. The hut into which they were put was already crowded to bursting point. There were some wooden bunks in tiers round the walls, but there were not enough of them to provide beds for the men who were already there, so the floor was covered with sleeping figures. It was stifling inside the hut, and the sour smell of unwashed men was dense. As the new batch of prisoners was pushed through the door, they stumbled in the darkness over the men who were already asleep on the floor, and there was an angry commotion. The guards, uninterested, slammed the door, leaving the men inside the hut to arrange matters between themselves as best they could. Cedonius and Rufus had been separated in the darkness, and they lay down in whatever space they could find. Rufus found himself next to an emaciated, stinking skeleton of a man who kept crying out in his sleep and trembling uncontrollably. At first, when the man began to clutch him with shaking hands, Rufus tried to disengage himself and to push the man away; but in the end he grew too exhausted to stop him. Sometime during the early hours of the morning the man seemed to go to sleep, his

hands still gripping Rufus in their thin, hard grasp. When Rufus tried to shake him off in the morning, he found that he could not do so. The man was dead.

At first sight, the penal settlement was surprisingly unlike a prison. There was a boundary fence, but it was in such a state of disrepair that it offered little obstacle to escape, and, in any case, most of the convicts worked in mines that lay outside it. Yet it was not easy to get away from the place. The convicts wore clothing of bright saffron yellow; there was a roll call twice a day; and guards with dogs patrolled the area of the camp and the surrounding country, both by night and by day. Even if a man tried to escape he seldom got far, and not more than half a dozen had ever succeeded in getting away altogether. Their clothing was too conspicuous by day, and very few men were a match for the dogs at night.

The discipline was savage, and the work was both dangerous and hard. The men were divided into gangs, and each gang was put under the supervision and authority of a foreman. These men were selected from the convicts themselves, and were given certain special privileges by the camp authorities. They lived under better conditions than did the other convicts, and they had their sentences reduced in proportion to the amount of rock quarried by the men in their charge. From the point of view of the authorities this scheme had two great advantages: first, it relieved the guards of a dangerous and unpleasant job, for not only did mine shafts collapse from time to time, but the men in the gangs had occasionally been known to turn on their guards and even two well-armed men stood very little

chance against a dozen criminals driven to despair by the brutality of their treatment and the hopelessness of their position; and, second, the prize of a reduced sentence, which was dangled in front of the convict foreman, was a most effective encouragement to him to get the last ounce of labor from the men in his charge. Naturally enough, a foreman's job attracted the worst kind of man, and it was usually given to the thugs, the bullies, and those who were noted for their innate brutality.

Cedonius and Rufus were put into the same gang. A man called Gratus was the foreman. He was not a big man, but he was more formidable than many men bigger than himself. He was a product of the slums of Rome. Aged about twenty-seven, he had had a varied career. His mother had been a prostitute, but she had died when he was about eight. He had joined one of the many gangs of boys who roamed the city and lived by crime, wit, and violence. By virtue of his ingenuity and his ruthlessness — let alone his courage — Gratus became leader of his gang by the time that he was about twelve. He organized the boys under his command so efficiently and planned their robberies so ingeniously that the reputation of his gang spread through the underworld, and he became almost a legend at an early age. In consequence, people began to desert the less successful gangs in order to enroll under Gratus, and his gang grew in numbers. By the time that he was fourteen he had sixty or seventy youths under his command, and he became ambitious. He was no longer satisfied with breaking into shops and houses, picking pockets, and gleaning what small harvest there was to be had from sneak thefts in the larger market places. He began to look for bigger game. While

still based on the sewers and hovels of the slums by the river, the gang began to make expeditions by night to the richer residential areas on the Capitoline and the Caelian hills. So successful were these forays and so widely did Gratus' reputation spread that the flow of new recruits to his gang, where before it had been a trickle, now became a flood, and he found himself in command of a small army of over three hundred youths. For a time, Gratus' gang terrorized the middle-class quarters of Rome. Their exploits went unchecked, and grew both in number and violence. Gratus' method was to choose a villa in its own garden and to make a careful reconnaissance, both of the possible ways of entry and of the best ways of retreat. Then on the chosen night his gang, in groups of two or three, converged upon the house from various directions and took up places Gratus had already appointed for them. The majority stayed outside the house to guard the approaches to it in depth, while a party of about a dozen broke in and rifled the contents. If the occupants gave trouble, they were beaten up, and, if necessary, they had their throats cut. Even when they were numerous, they were seldom able to resist successfully, for as soon as things began to go badly for him, Gratus would call up his reserves. In the end, his success was his undoing. The authorities at last became so disturbed by them that they determined to smash Gratus and his gang at any cost. This eventually they did, but only with the help of the army, which they called in to supplement the police.

Gratus escaped with a dozen or so of his followers and left Rome. By this time he was about nineteen. He made his way to Tuscany, where he joined one of the many bands

of brigands who operated there. He was as successful in the hills as he had been in the city and once again his success was so great that the authorities were forced to take notice of him and to organize an almost full-scale military operation against him. This time he was captured. Most of his men were executed, but he himself somehow succeeded in saving his own life — probably as a result of regular, precautionary bribery before his capture — and he was sent to Sardinia.

Since then, he had succeeded in making both a name and a place for himself in the penal settlement. He was foreman of a gang, and he had managed to secure certain other privileges, which made his life more comfortable than the lives of the other prisoners. On arrival, his first success had been to get himself appointed to the cookhouse, and in this way he had avoided work in the gangs on the rock face. The great advantage of being in the cookhouse was that there were endless opportunities for extending one's influence throughout the camp; for he who was in charge of the men's rations could increase or decrease them as he liked and use this power to get what he wanted from those he fed. Of course, there was the added advantage that he always fed himself well. Over and above this, he slept in a comparatively comfortable room with the other cooks and escaped the squalor and the overcrowding of the huts. When he had been there for about two years, he offered himself for the job of foreman, and at the same time volunteered to continue to do as much of his own work in the cookhouse as possible in his free time. This was a masterly piece of tactics: it pleased the camp Commandant and gave him a high opinion of Gratus. Moreover, it was not

long before Gratus was excused duty in the cookhouse, while being allowed to retain all the privileges that went with it. Slowly he ingratiated himself more and more with the camp Commandant, until he was treated more like a guard than a convict. On several occasions he was even sent down to Calares on errands, and each time he had been wise enough to return to the camp without delay. In this way he built up a reputation for trustworthiness that earned him a greater measure of freedom than any other convict had ever known.

In some ways Gratus was a good foreman under whom to work. His gang worked in a mine shaft that lay about two miles from the camp. Each morning he marched the men down a valley that ran southwest from the camp and wound between rocky olive-covered hills. The mine was driven horizontally into the face of the hill on the north-west side of the valley and was within sight of the sea. When they arrived for their first day's work, Cedonius and Rufus found that the gang was divided into two parties, one of which worked on the rock face, while the other carried the quarried rock to the surface, and dumped it there. They soon discovered, too, that so long as they worked hard, Gratus was easy and friendly to them; but there were men in his gang who did not work hard, because their strength had been broken by the labor and by the island fever. This illness was a scourge very few people escaped for long; in fact, Sardinia was notorious for its ill health. Gratus' methods of dealing with the feeble and the slack were based upon an ascending scale of severity. At first he merely threatened to reduce the offender's food, and if this did not have any effect, he had no compunction in putting

his threat into practice. This was, in fact, a far more effective means of getting the last ounce of effort out of a man than that usually resorted to by the other foremen, who were not in Gratus' position of authority in the cookhouse and had to rely upon physical violence. All the foremen carried whips, but it was only in the last resort that Gratus used his.

In some respects he was, perhaps, even more dangerous than the other foremen, for he seemed to have been born without a capacity for sympathy in any shape or form. He regarded his fellow men as objects for exploitation and as useful tools for the furtherance of his own plans. He did not even regard them as a farmer regards his cattle; a farmer has a certain vested interest in the life and health of his beasts, and Gratus had absolutely no interest at all in either the life or the health of the men who worked under him. All his life he had found that men were the most easily replaceable things in the world, and here in Sardinia they were even more easily replaced than they had been in the slums of Rome, for there was always a steady stream of convicts flowing into the camp. So, when a man began to show signs of physical degeneration as a result of overwork or fever, Gratus took the view that the sooner he was replaced the better. A sick man was not an economic proposition; it was far better to discard him; but in Sardinia men were only discarded when they died. When Gratus began to consider that a man was showing signs of having outlived his usefulness, he began to cut down his food in order to hasten the man's death. Occasionally a man would be obstinately slow in dying, hanging on to life with an astonishing pertinacity, and continuing to work even when he

was reduced to a mere skeleton. With such people Gratus was impatient, and it was with them that he resorted to violence. He did not flog them out of malice or for the pleasure of the thing, for — unlike some of the other foremen — he was neither sadistic nor particularly cruel; he flogged them simply and solely to encourage them to die quickly, so that their places might be taken by more productive units that would increase the output of his gang.

There was room only for four men to work on the rock face at the end of the shaft. Cedonius and Rufus were two of them. Since there was little space, they were cramped, and for a few days they did not learn the knack of wielding a pickaxe without hitting their fellows. However, Gratus was surprisingly kind to them, actually showing them how to handle their tools and telling them with a laugh that they would soon get into the way of it. He was right, for by the end of the week they had become quite proficient. While they worked the other men in the gang loaded the rock into baskets and carried it to the surface. In many ways this was harder than working on the rock face. What made it worse was that Gratus kept a record of the number of baskets carried by each man during the course of the day, and if one of them should fall short of his quota, he would incur the foreman's penalties. However, the men transporting the rock to the surface did at least get a breath of fresh air from time to time, while those at the end of the shaft worked in a torch-lit darkness that was airless and heavy with dust. It was an enormous relief to Cedonius to emerge from the shaft into the sunlight at the end of the day's work; the best parts of the day were the marches to and from the camp.

In many ways life in the camp itself was worse than work in the mine. Cedonius and Rufus remained in the hut where they had been put on the night of their arrival. After a time they became accustomed to the overcrowded conditions, the stink, and even the fairly common occurrence of finding a man dead when they woke in the morning. But the worst feature of the place was the complete absence of friendship between the convicts. The idea of mutual help never occurred to any of them. On the surface there appeared to be a certain camaraderie, but it went no deeper than the surface. If a man could steal his neighbor's food or foist upon another the blame for something he himself had done, he would do so without hesitation or compunction, even if it meant that the other man would be half flogged to death as a punishment. Similarly, when one of the men in the hut began to show signs of failing strength, there would be a greedy and ruthless rush to deprive him of whatever he might own. If he happened to be fortunate enough to have secured a bunk in which to sleep, someone soon saw to it that in the future he slept on the floor; his food was pilfered; he was forced to undertake the unpopular and the menial tasks in the hut, and if he showed signs of reluctance he was beaten up. The social life of the settlement was a kind of logical caricature of the life of competitive society in the greater world outside; each man fended for himself, and the weaker ones were eliminated. There was about as much honor among the thieves of Sardinia as there is etiquette among the animals in the jungle.

After about a month something happened to change the pattern of life in the camp for Cedonius and Rufus. One

of the other two men who worked on the rock face—a plump, middle-aged slave who had spilled a jug of boiling water over one of his master's favorite concubines and had been sentenced to Sardinia for his pains—died in the night quite suddenly of a heart attack. At the time, there did not happen to be a batch of new prisoners from whom a replacement could be found, and a big dark man was loaned to Gratus from another gang and put to work on the rock face. He had a particularly villainous face with a broken nose and pock-marked cheeks and the cauliflower ears of a prizefighter, and he seldom spoke to anyone. He was an enormously powerful man, and Cedonius, when he first saw him, wondered why he had not been selected as a foreman, for he looked as if he was just the kind of unscrupulous thug who would seek the job. He worked next to Rufus. He had been there for about two days when Cedonius noticed him looking at Rufus with an intent, rather curious expression as Rufus made use of one of his favorite scriptural tags; but the man said nothing, and Cedonius thought no more about it.

That evening Cedonius and Rufus were lying on the ground outside their hut. After the day's work was over, the men were allowed to rest and do as they wished for a short time before they were shut into their huts for the night. Many of them were too tired or too ill to do anything but collapse into their bunks or, if they had no bunk, onto the floor and sleep; but many of the others lay outside in the evening sun. On this particular evening, Cedonius noticed the big dark man approaching them. He pushed himself up on one elbow, and awaited the man's arrival with suspicion. For a time, he could not be sure whether

the man intended to speak to him or whether he was simply passing in their direction; but when he was within a few yards, it was obvious that he meant to speak to them. Cedonius got up from the ground and faced him defensively. He came right up to them, looking as villainous as ever, and stopped, slightly out of breath from his walk up the hill.

"My name is Marcus," he said. "Something I overheard you say this morning led me to believe that you must be Christians."

While he was speaking, he kept his eyes on the ground; but then he raised them, and looked straight at Cedonius.

"Am I right?" he asked.

Rufus had risen from the ground and was standing next to Cedonius, facing their visitor. Cedonius' voice was hostile and guarded as he replied, "I don't see what business it is of yours. What does it matter to you what we are?"

The man smiled, and for a moment his face looked quite different. It was like seeing the sun break through a thundercloud.

"I am a priest," he said.

It was not until some weeks later that Cedonius discovered how Marcus did it, but within three days of the evening when he and Rufus had first talked to him, Marcus had succeeded in arranging things in such a way that Cedonius and Rufus had been transferred to the hut in which he lived, where all the convicts were Christians. As a matter of fact, Marcus had called for two volunteers — men who, having been in the camp for some time, had learned how to look after themselves and how to survive its

rigors — to change places with Cedonius and Rufus who, as new arrivals, were in greater need of the friendship and protection of the company of Christians in Marcus' hut. Cedonius soon discovered what a difference it made to life in the penal settlement to live among Christians. For the first time in his life he began to recognize in experience the living reality of many things, with which he had been familiar as abstract concepts since his childhood. Above all, he began to learn what the description of the Church as the body of Christ meant. Times without number he had heard it said that the Church was in the world but not of the world. The words had meant nothing to him at all; they had been just words, abstract theological niceties divorced from any connection with the business of living. Suddenly, it was as if the Church, until now a wax flower, had been transformed under his eyes into a living, scented blossom; for, as the Church was in the world but not of the world, so the Christians whom he now began to know were in this hell of a penal settlement but not of it. They were the body of Christ, in the sense that they were his limbs and did his work. They helped each other, cared for each other, and even loved each other with the kind of objective, unemotional love that grows and flowers in the soil of a common misfortune. For the first time in his life, too, such things as the love of the brethren and the power of the Holy Spirit took flesh before his eyes; and the power of Christ crucified and the love of God began to break through the shell of his own self-reliance and self-regard, and the veil of unreality behind which they had remained hidden for so long.

Marcus was in charge of the hut, in so far as anyone was

in charge of it. He was a remarkable man. He had been born in circumstances very similar to those of Gratus, and, as a matter of fact, at the age of fourteen he had joined Gratus' gang. When it had been smashed, and Gratus had been forced to leave Rome, Marcus had escaped too; but he had not gone to Tuscany with Gratus. Instead, he had hidden in the slums of Rome, where he had been befriended by a Christian family. It had been almost the first time in his life when he had been treated with real friendship — friendship given freely for its own sake, and without any expectation of return. As a result he had been converted and had joined the Church. Two years later he had been ordained and had begun to work in the slums he knew so well. Shortly after this he had been betrayed to the authorities by a man who had been a member of Gratus' gang with him, and who, when he had failed to persuade Marcus to go back to his old ways, had laid information against him with the police; and Marcus had been sent to Sardinia.

Any kind of Christian worship was strictly forbidden in the camp. When Christian convicts arrived, they were told that anyone who took part in such a thing would incur very severe penalties, while those who organized it would be liable to the death penalty. But this was not a very formidable threat, for, since none of the prisoners could ever hope to leave Sardinia alive, much of the sting was taken out of the threat of death and the thought of dying. When a thing is inevitable and imminent, it does not matter very much how soon it occurs. So Christian worship took place regularly in Marcus' hut. Usually it was confined to prayer, but since the arrival of Marcus eighteen months

previously, the Eucharist had been celebrated three times. This had only been possible because a Christian who had once been a cook in a patrician household had arrived at about the same time as Marcus and had been put to work in the cookhouse, where his skill was used to the advantage of the camp guards. He was an extremely good cook, and the camp Commandant — a fat little man who was fond of his food — was highly delighted by the man's arrival. Whenever he could do so, he smuggled a little wine out of the cookhouse and gave it to Marcus. Since it was both a difficult and a dangerous proceeding, he did not dare to do it very often, and it took him several weeks to smuggle enough for a celebration. Moreover, if the man had been discovered, the least that he could have expected by way of punishment would have been to be expelled from the cookhouse; and if this had happened, there would have been no chance of getting wine from any other source. So it was better to take the greatest possible precautions and to celebrate the Eucharist occasionally than risk detection by trying to do it more often.

When Cedonius had been in Sardinia for about six months, it happened again. The arrangements had been carefully made and all the Christians in the camp had been told of them some days before. As it happened, the day was stormy. It was fine when the working parties set out in the morning, but by noon there was a great concentration of thunderclouds over the hills, and during the afternoon the sky was dark and ominous. At one moment the air was as still and as silent as dark water, and then suddenly a short gust of wind would blow up the valley, bending the

stunted olive trees as it passed, and whistling through the dry grass and thistles that grew in the rocky soil. By the middle of the afternoon the thunder began to rumble and clatter in the hills, its echoes rolling down the rocky valleys. About an hour before the men were due to stop work it began to rain. At first there were only a few fat white drops, which splashed on the stones and made little dark, dusty beads in the dry earth, but while the men were walking back to the camp in a heavy twilight, the clouds opened as though they had been slit with a knife and the rain came down with such violence, hissing and stinging as it fell onto the warm stony ground, that visibility was reduced to a few yards. Soaked to the skin and streaming with water, the convicts plodded on through a steamy blanket of rain. When they arrived, they found that the camp had been partly inundated. The floor of Marcus' hut had been turned into a quagmire by a stream of rain water that had come down a little dry gully and had forced its way through the loose stones of the walls of the hut.

The rain stopped as suddenly as it had begun, and the men began to try to dry their clothes. When the sun came out again and shone into the valley, it was filled with naked men spreading their yellow clothes on thorn bushes and on the ground, where they began to steam; but it was too late in the day for the things to get dry before sundown, and when Cedonius dressed again, his clothes were damp, and stuck to his body.

They waited until about two o'clock in the morning before beginning, and they had no lights. About a dozen Christians who lived in other huts had made their way in

ones and twos to Marcus' hut before it was dark, and the place was even more crowded than usual. Some of the men had not dressed again, disliking their damp clothing, and as they stood in the dark hut, naked, their white bodies glimmered and shone, with the whiteness of mushrooms at night, in a swath of moonlight which streamed in through a barred window in the stone cell; through the bars the sky was the color of ink mixed with milk. They were packed so tightly together that there was no room in which to sit down, but space was made for some who were too weak to stand. The floor of the hut had been turned into mud by the afternoon's flood, and Cedonius could feel it cold and slimy between the toes of his bare feet. As the men moved their weight from one leg to the other there was a faint noise of squelching mud, while outside the hut the mosquitoes were whining. Marcus could scarcely be seen in the darkness at one end of the hut. Although he did not whisper, he kept his voice very low. It was a deep voice, and it sounded calm and unhurried as he began to recite the familiar words of the liturgy. He had not got far when something happened to Cedonius. He was filled with a depth and a quality of stillness that he had never before experienced. It was as though he had been annihilated in the overwhelming stillness of God.

"Lift up your hearts," Marcus said; and the men answered quietly, "We have them to the Lord."

"Let us give thanks unto our Lord God," said Marcus, and turned in the darkness of the hut. His deep voice sounded like the noise of a distant sea breaking on the lonely shores of the world. Outside, a seagull, aroused by a fox, wheeled and cried in the night air, while inside the

men stood silently, pressed together and waiting for the climax of the drama they were enacting.

"... who, when he was given over to his willing suffering . . . that he might dissolve death . . . having taken bread, gave thanks unto Thee and said: 'Take — eat — This — is — my — body — which is broken — for you . . .'"

The gull's cry sounded lonely and thin in the night air.

"... likewise also the cup, saying: 'This — is — my — blood . . . which is poured out for you. When ye do this, ye make my memorial.'"

There was a man next to Cedonius who could not stand; his breathing was short and irregular. Cedonius could feel him trembling with fever and exhaustion.

"... we beseech Thee to send thy Holy Spirit upon the sacrifice of thy Church . . ."

Cedonius thought that it was a sacrifice, this Church of God's; a sacrifice of which he was a part. He had often heard the words, but they had meant nothing to him until now. Now, for the first time, they meant a great deal. It was indeed a sacrifice, the Church of God.

There was no room for Marcus to come round with the sacrament, and it was impossible for the men to go to Marcus; they were too crowded together; so a bowl and an earthenware mug were passed from hand to hand round the room.

"The bread of heaven in Christ Jesus," Marcus said, as he handed the bowl to the man nearest to him; and as each man handed it to his neighbor he said quietly, "The bread of heaven in Christ Jesus."

When it was finished, those who lived in other huts tried to find space on the floor in which to sleep. On the next

day Cedonius discovered that the man with fever, who had lain at his feet, had died during the early hours of the morning.

Some months later, two things happened simultaneously: Rufus contracted the island fever, and his job was changed by Gratus, who took him off the rock face, and put him to work with the men who were carrying rock to the surface. Gratus, who by long practice could recognize the first symptoms of the fever earlier than anyone else, had made up his mind that Rufus — never a very productive worker — had nearly come to the end of his usefulness. When he saw him sickening for the illness that destroyed so many of the convicts, he decided to hasten matters by putting him on to the much harder work of the transport gang. What made this turn of events particularly disastrous was that three days later the time came to begin moving the accumulated pile of quarried rock from the dump to the camp. A new gang of men was raised to do this, and Gratus promptly had Rufus transferred to the newly raised gang, so that the little man no longer even worked with Cedonius.

The new gang was under the command of one of the most unpleasant of the foremen, Publius, who had been a second-rate gladiator condemned to Sardinia for robbery with violence. He was large, muscular, and stupid. He was also a bully. Lacking the intelligence of Gratus, he relied entirely upon force to control the men under him and make them work. He treated them like pack animals, beating them when he felt like it, exactly as he would have beaten mules. Cedonius was so alarmed by this turn of events, and so upset by the evident failure of Rufus' health

and strength, that he did not know what to do. Working on the rock face all day, he never even got an opportunity to see Rufus for a minute at the entrance to the mine, and he found that he could not bear the long hours of anxiety and suspense underground, wondering how his friend was faring and waiting on tenterhooks to see him again in the evening. After a few days, he asked Gratus whether he, too, could be transferred to the new gang; but Gratus refused to transfer him. In desperation he asked if he might be transferred to the gang which was carrying the rock up the mine shaft to the surface, knowing that if he were given this job he would at least catch a glimpse or two of Rufus during the day. Cedonius was a good worker and Gratus' reason for refusing his first application had been a desire to keep him in his own gang, so that although he unhesitatingly refused Cedonius' first request he granted his second immediately, and Cedonius left the rock face. But this did not help matters much. He saw Rufus only on rare occasions, for their visits to the entrance to the mine did not often coincide. Usually Cedonius was in the mine when Rufus arrived to collect another load of rock for the camp. Moreover, the occasional glimpses of Rufus served merely to add to his distress, for each passing day brought clearer proof of increasing weakness. When Publius happened to be present at the entrance to the mine, he seemed to take a delight in standing over the little man and forcing him to go on piling rock into his basket until it was so full that it was too heavy for a man twice Rufus' size. Then he stood jeering and goading Rufus as he tried to shoulder it and stagger upright. When he failed, which was often, Publius would kick and beat him before con-

temptuously allowing him to empty some of the rock from the basket until it was light enough for him to carry without actually falling down.

That first winter in Sardinia was a nightmare for Cedonius, and it seemed endless. He had always liked Rufus, but it was during this period that he discovered — to his surprise, for the experience was new to him — that he was capable of loving someone. The discovery was painful and unwelcome. Under other circumstances, it might have been an enjoyable discovery, but now, with Rufus daily growing weaker and weaker, Cedonius' love for him yielded nothing but an engrossing obsession and an agonizing anxiety. What made things worse for Cedonius was the sudden realization that he admired Rufus, and to admire such a ridiculous and ignoble little man was the death of his own pride. For the first time in his life he was being forced to measure his own talents and strength against the foolishness and weakness of Rufus, to the detriment of himself; for the first time in his life such idiotic ideas as the blessedness of the meek, which he had always despised as unpractical and stupid, were coming alive in Rufus and shaming him; for the first time in his life the power of Christ crucified — that absurd paradox of the victory and nobility of failure in squalor — was being acted out and given reality in the flesh of his friend. During the day while he was working on the rock face, he was obsessed with fears and anxieties, wondering how Rufus was supporting another day's labor. Once or twice Cedonius was lucky enough to meet Rufus at the entrance to the mine when Publius was not there, and when that happened, he made his white and exhausted friend sit down while he filled his

basket for him. Rufus only accepted Cedonius' help under protest, for he refused to admit that there was anything wrong with him. It might have been easier for Cedonius if Rufus would have admitted that he was ill, but he would not do so. To his friend's anxious inquiries he would always give the same reply: there was no need to worry about him. But as the weeks went by, and he grew more and more feeble, the smile with which he reassured Cedonius became thinner and thinner.

Things continued in this way during the winter. By the spring Rufus was reduced to a skeleton. Even his hair looked dead. Each time that Cedonius saw him he was astonished that anyone so emaciated could still continue to do the work Rufus was doing. March was windy and rough, but toward the end of it the Mediterranean summer arrived overnight. The days were brilliant, hot, and glittering, and the hillside covered itself in a foam of apple green. Then one afternoon Rufus collapsed. When Cedonius came to the surface of the mine, he found him lying on the ground. He was only half conscious, and he was breathing quickly and painfully. Luckily, Publius was supervising the work of his gang at their unloading point in the camp. Cedonius lifted up his friend and carried him just inside the entrance to a disused mine shaft. He laid him down in the shade against the wall, went back to get his basket, and hid it in the mine. He could not stay — for he had to get back to his own work before his absence was noticed by Gratus — but he hoped that, with any luck, Publius might not return to the mine that day, and Rufus' absence might go undetected. Cedonius spent the rest of the day in an agony of suspense. Each time that

he made a journey to the surface, he was sure he would find that Publius had returned and discovered Rufus; or that Rufus had recovered sufficiently to start work again, and had gone off with a new load of rock. As it happened, Publius did not return and by evening when they finished work, Rufus had recovered enough strength to be able to walk back to the camp. Publius had not noticed his absence.

Things could not continue for long in this way. Two days later Rufus collapsed again; but this time he did so not at the entrance to the mine but halfway between the mine and the camp. Here Publius found him. Rufus was so obviously incapable of working that even Publius realized beating him or goading him into further work that day would be a waste of energy; and, surprisingly, he left him alone. But for the rest of that week Publius concentrated upon Rufus with the brutality and the bestial pleasure of a large animal tormenting a smaller one. If the sight of Rufus in a state of collapse had momentarily failed to arouse the natural instincts of a bully in Publius, the sight of him, slow, weak, and white in the face as he struggled to carry his loads of rock, succeeded in arousing all his ferocity.

Five days later when during the course of the morning Cedonius reached the entrance to the mine, another member of Publius' gang told him that Rufus had collapsed again; this time at the camp.

"Publius has had a go at him," the man said.

"What do you mean?" Cedonius asked. "What's he done?"

"He's beaten him up," the man replied.

It had been a superb day. As the men marched home to the camp that evening the sky was as dark blue as a gentian, and the air was warm and filled with the buzzing of insects. The silvery gray leaves of the olive trees sparkled and trembled in the softness of the sun, and everything smelt delicious. To Cedonius, who knew every shoulder of hill and every blade of grass, the journey had never seemed so long. When he reached the camp he looked for Rufus. No one seemed to know where he was, though several men had seen him beaten. Somehow he had managed to crawl to the top of a little rocky promontory just outside the camp, and here, eventually, Cedonius found him lying on his face.

Rufus had been flogged with a severity that was unusual even in such a place as the penal settlement, and his back was clotted with blood from his neck to his knees. He was lying in a patch of wild iris. Six inches high and just in flower, the blooms were the same ravishing, shadowy blue as that of a child's veins, and their petals, curved and convoluted with the delicate formality, arch, and flare of shells, shone in the sun with the softness and the sheen of silk. He took Rufus' head in his hands, and raised it from the ground. Undemeath, a crushed iris was spotted and blotched with blood, dark brown on the bruised blue petals. Three of his front teeth had been knocked out, and his chin was smeared with blood. He was breathing very slowly and very faintly.

Cedonius picked him up in his arms, and carried him to the hut. He was so thin and small that he weighed less than one of the loads of rock he had been struggling to carry earlier in the day. His legs hung down, sticking out

from his yellow trousers, white, thin, and polished like twigs of hazel that had been peeled, and his feet, looking too big for his legs, dangled aimlessly at the end of them. The rest of the men in the hut made way for Cedonius as he came in. They said nothing, standing round him in silence as he sponged Rufus' face with a damp rag. Cedonius remembered how Rufus had done the same thing for him in the cell of the Magistrate's Court when they had been awaiting trial in Rome. Memories of Rufus in Hypatius' house — his cheerfulness, his kindness, and his self-deprecation — filled Cedonius' mind. He recalled how Rufus had begged him not to go to Portus, and how he had tried to dissuade him from going to the Synagogue. He remembered, too, how Rufus had been beaten into revealing where he, Cedonius, had gone when he had made his first flight from Rome, and how Rufus had brought him food in the mill. He remembered that it had been Rufus who had collected contributions from the other slaves in Hypatius' house until he had got enough money to repay Hypatius Cedonius' debt. Above all, as he looked down at the broken and emaciated little body on the floor of the hut, he tried to estimate how much he owed to this man in whom, for the first time, he had seen the flowering of the love of God.

Rufus died during the early part of the night. Marcus turned to Cedonius and said, "He died in Christ."

Rufus was one of the first victims of an epidemic of the island fever even more widespread and severe than usual. During the summer of A.D. 188 so many convicts died and the gangs were so depleted that the productive work of

the mine was reduced to less than half its former proportions. Some of the foremen also died, to the great satisfaction of the men who had suffered at their hands for so long. The death of Publius was hailed with especial delight. For several days the convicts went about their work almost cheerfully, and they could be heard talking to each other and laughing with sheer pleasure at the thought that death, at least, was impartial. Some of the camp guards too went down with the fever, but not many of them died from it, for they were allowed to go to bed and rest when ill, and thus they had a better chance of recovery than those to whom illness brought no escape from work.

Cedonius escaped the infection. He was naturally strong, and the privations and trials of Sardinia had toughened rather than weakened him. He was thin, but every inch of his body was as hard and flexible as steel and, if anything, he was healthier than he had been in the old days in Rome. Marcus, too, was the kind of rock-like man who flourished physically in the hard soil of Sardinia, and both men used their superior physique and their good health to help some of the other men who fell sick. After Rufus' death Cedonius did not ask to be put back to work on the rock face; he remained in the gang that was carrying quarried rock to the surface. When one of the other men showed signs of weakness, he would take the man's load into his own basket. Somehow this helped to lighten the burden of guilt for Rufus' death under which he felt crushed. Rufus he could no longer help, but at least he was able to do for others what he had been unable to do for Rufus. Since most of the other men working in the gang with him were not Christians, they regarded his be-

havior as closely akin to lunacy. At first when he began to help the men who were sick they greeted his overtures with suspicion; they thought that there must be a trick hidden under his offers of assistance. But as the months passed, and no ulterior motive was uncovered by events, they accepted his help, and gave up trying to understand his motives. By the autumn, when the colder weather brought the epidemic of fever to an end, the survivors were unable wholly to conceal a grudging affection and admiration for this man whom they still looked upon as slightly mad. Moreover, they were rather bewildered, for it was only in this one matter of helping other people that he showed any signs of weak-mindedness. In all other respects he was obviously and eminently sane.

As a matter of fact, the world in which Cedonius was living seemed quite different from that in which he had existed for over thirty years. It was as though until now his eyesight had been bad, and he had seen everything slightly out of focus; now, despite the fact that it was recognizably the same world around him, he saw it with a clarity and a sharpness that were new and astonishing. During the whole of his previous life he had lived and worked for various gods: freedom, success, power. Now these gods were dead. It was absurd to worship freedom any longer, for there was not the smallest chance of ever being free again. The idea of success had become entirely remote from reality, for it was a criterion of social achievement which simply did not apply to the kind of life which existed in the prison camp. As far as power was concerned, his ideas had been greatly transformed during his life as

a convict. On the one hand, he had seen, and could still see, the nature of power and its effect upon those who wielded it. The camp guards, the foremen, and the hierarchy of muscle, in which the convicts themselves were arranged in a scale descending from strength to weakness, were not good advertisements for power. On the other hand, he had seen the nature and the invincibility of a certain kind of weakness in Rufus. So he found that he no longer wanted any of the things for which he had striven for so long. Life in Sardinia was necessarily life in and for the present moment, for, when the possibility — indeed, the probability — was that a man would die within a very short time, that man was unlikely to pin his hopes on the future. So for the first time Cedonius lived in the present, and life took on a richness that only adversity of circumstance and singleness of mind made possible. Fever, semi-starvation, the lash, bestial labor, and the death of his friends were transformed by a new vision of God. Instead of disgusting and sickening him, since the death of Rufus they seemed to proclaim Christ crucified. Instead of making life intolerable, they made it immeasurably rich, for he was overwhelmingly conscious of the real nature of the Church and of his own status as a member of the body of Christ. He could not forget or get out of his mind the words he had heard so often in the Eucharist — which he had heard as it were for the first time when Marcus had spoken them on the night of the celebration in the hut: "We beseech Thee to send thy Holy Spirit upon the sacrifice of thy Church." The Church in Sardinia was indeed a sacrifice, and Cedonius found himself part of it.

Then, about eighteen months later, the Jew Myonides arrived in the camp. The work of the day was over and Cedonius was walking across the camp on his way to the hut, when he saw a new batch of convicts being marched to their quarters by a party of guards. He glanced at them without any particular interest, wondering whether some of them might perhaps be condemned Christians. As he turned his head away, out of the corner of his eye he suddenly saw Myonides. He felt as though the whole inside of his body had been turned over in a churn. He stopped with his eyes fixed on the figure of the little Jew, who was shuffling along dejectedly with hands manacled and chained to his fellows. Gusts of uncontrollable anger and hatred swept through him and made him tremble. He waited until he had seen Myonides thrust into a hut on the other side of the valley. It was hut number fifteen, and as he made a mental note of its number, he wondered for a moment why he did so; but there was no need to wonder: he knew.

Cedonius fought a long and bitter battle with himself. He knew that his hatred of Myonides and his plans of revenge alike were futile. Side by side with these things there stood an almost equally bitter disgust with himself. If Myonides' arrival had shown Cedonius one thing clearly, it was the futility of revenge. He realized that if he had taken Rufus' advice, and instead of going to the Synagogue had waited upon events, probably by now he would have recovered the money Myonides owed him, that he would not be in Sardinia, and, above all, Rufus would not be dead. For it was clear that the police must have caught

the Jew, and it was to be presumed that he had been compelled to make restitution. Although Cedonius saw all this objectively and clearly, he found himself quite unable to control the violence of his hatred of Myonides. It welled up inside him like a fountain of hot soda water, making him dizzy with its effervescence. Time after time he decided to confide in Marcus, but each time that he approached him, he could not bring himself to the point of asking for his advice. In any case, he knew what Marcus would say, and he knew, too, that nothing Marcus might say would alter his intention. He meant to kill Myonides, and to do so at the first opportunity.

At about this time Cedonius was put back to work on the rock face. He did not argue, but the sudden change of work upset his plan for dealing with Myonides, whose job was the carriage of quarried rock from the mine to the camp. Cedonius had avoided the Jew during the month that had passed since the man's arrival in Sardinia, and he did not think that Myonides was aware of his presence. Had he not been put to different work, the two men must have met at the entrance to the mine, and then it would have been easy to settle accounts; but now all this was changed.

In a way this change was a relief to Cedonius, but he was muddled and he did not really know his own mind. He was half convinced that this turn of events was not fortuitous; it seemed to him that it might be God's way of saving him from himself. With the other half of his mind he was bitterly skeptical of the idea that God might have had a hand in his change of job, and he felt angry

and frustrated at being cheated of his planned revenge; it was just chance, and it was absurd to read into it any greater significance than that.

About a week later, he broke his pickaxe. Usually a number of spare tools were kept at the mine, but as it happened on this particular occasion there were none. Cedonius found Gratus, and told him what had happened. It was early in the day, and the men had only been working for about an hour and a half, so Gratus told him to go back to the camp to get a new one. Halfway between the mine and the camp he saw Myonides. The small Jew was unused to physical labor. He was staggering along very slowly in his yellow clothes, two hundreds yards ahead of Cedonius, carrying a load of rock on his back. Cedonius quickened his step. The sun suddenly felt hotter than usual on his skin, and when he put his hand up to wipe the hair from his forehead it was damp.

Quietly Cedonius caught up with the man in front of him, and for a short time he walked just behind him, playing a sort of cat-and-mouse game with him and swinging the broken pickaxe in his right hand. Myonides was still unaware that he was being followed, when Cedonius drew abreast of him and said, "Well, Myonides. This is a surprise."

The little Jew stopped, and dropped the basket from his shoulders. As it fell, it tipped over and some of the rock spilled out of it onto the ground. He was a sallow-skinned man, and his bald head was like a pickled onion. He was out of breath and as he stood there, panting and startled, he looked up at Cedonius with shining black eyes that

glistened as brightly as half-sucked jujubes. Cedonius was still swinging the broken pickaxe in his right hand. Myonides' eyes moved from Cedonius' face to the pickaxe and back again.

"You didn't expect to see me here," Cedonius said.

Myonides rubbed the palms of his hands against the front of his tunic and ran the tip of his tongue over his lips.

"No, I didn't," he replied. "But I seem to remember hearing that you had been sent to Sardinia. Marcellus told me."

"Thanks to you," Cedonius said. "You got me here, Myonides. If it hadn't been for you, I should be a free man in Rome today. It seems to me that I owe you a great deal. Don't you agree?"

The extraordinary thing was that Myonides was not in the least frightened. Cedonius had expected him to be terrified; he had expected him to cringe, to tremble, and to plead. Instead, Myonides was looking at him with a mixture of hatred and contempt. Cedonius could not understand the reactions of the man in front of him, and because events had not developed as he had expected, he felt a sudden uncertainty. Moreover, he felt an unwelcome stirring of pity for the Jew. Under the sallow, yellowish hue of his skin, the man's face was pale and twitching slightly with exhaustion.

"I don't understand you, Myonides," Cedonius said. "You know perfectly well that you cheated me, and that you are responsible for my condemnation to this place. Yet I don't believe that you feel in the least guilty about it. You don't even look frightened. Don't you realize that

I am in a position to do exactly as I like with you?" He swung the pickaxe idly in his hand. "I could kill you without the least trouble, you know."

Myonides sat down on his overturned basket and looked up at Cedonius without expression.

"Yes, I realize that. Are you going to do so?" he asked him.

Cedonius felt flat and miserable; everything seemed empty and pointless. He dropped the broken pickaxe to the ground, and kicked it with the gesture of a frustrated schoolboy.

"No," he said, "I'm not. Get up, and I will help you with your basket."

The two men knelt down, side by side, and while Myonides pulled his basket upright, Cedonius began to help him load it again with the spilled rock. Neither of them said anything. The only sound in the valley was the noise of the dry grass moving gently in the breeze and the whistling of a lark in the sky. When the basket was loaded Cedonius helped Myonides to get it up onto his back again, and the two of them began to walk toward the camp together. They walked for half a mile in silence. Then Cedonius turned to his companion and said, "I was right, wasn't I? You don't feel guilty for having been the cause of my condemnation. I wish I could understand why."

Myonides did not reply for a moment. Eventually he said, "Yes, you are quite right. But why should I feel guilty? You are a Gentile."

"A Gentile!" said Cedonius in astonishment. "What difference does that make?"

"I am a Jew," Myonides replied, "and the Jews are the

people of God. You Christians have never understood anything about God at all. Salvation is of the Jews. The world is ours, and in God's time all the nations of the world will pay us tribute. You paid me a little tribute — against your will, admittedly, but nevertheless tribute — and it was my right. Anything is fair, when you are dealing with a Gentile."

"You really believe this, don't you?" Cedonius said.

Myonides did not even bother to reply, and as Cedonius walked along beside him he was astonished at the depth and perversity of this man's faith. There was no doubt that it was real faith. It was simply the wrong kind. Wrong because it was faith in the wrong kind of God: a God of vengeance, destruction, and militant nationalism. By his own lights, Myonides' conduct had been not merely correct but even laudable, for by robbing Cedonius and making himself richer, Myonides had increased the power of the people of God on earth and, *pari passu*, of God. Confronted with this genuine, if wrongheaded, conviction, Cedonius' hatred and desire for revenge disappeared. It was impossible to hate a man merely for being wrong; you might hate him for being malicious, but not for being misguided. Suddenly Cedonius was filled with pity for the man by his side. It had occurred to him, too, that if it had not been for Myonides he would never have discovered what he now knew about God, and he would not have been in a position to recognize the mistakenness of Myonides' faith. Far from having ruined his life, Myonides had made it; for Cedonius knew that it was adversity which had revealed to him the kind of God who, instead of promising universal destruction and horror to the Gentile

world, had died, naked and alone on a cross, for the sake of that same world and for its salvation. It was Myonides who was living in a sort of hell; and, indirectly, it was Myonides who had opened for him the way of escape from his own particular purgatory.

He looked at the man beside him. Myonides was sweating under the weight of his load, and his face was drawn and gray.

"Stop a minute, and I'll carry the rock for a bit," Cedonius said to him in rather a peevish voice.

When the Jew stopped, he was too exhausted to lower the basket from his shoulders to the ground. Once again he dropped it, and it spilled. For the second time the two men knelt down and gathered up the rock. When Cedonius had picked up the basket and put it on his back, Myonides turned to him and said, "Now it's my turn to say that I do not understand you."

"No, I don't suppose you do," Cedonius said. "I don't expect you ever will. We have different ideas of God; that is the trouble. It makes such a difference what kind of god you believe in."

After this, Cedonius avoided Myonides. It was not difficult to do so, for the Jew lived in a different part of the camp. So, nine months later, it came as a shock to Cedonius when he heard, quite casually, that Myonides was dead. Apparently the Jew had been killed by a fall of rock near the entrance to the mine shaft in which he worked. Such accidents were quite common, and Cedonius did not know why the news affected him as it did. He should not even have been surprised, for condemnation to the mines

in Sardinia was virtually equivalent to a death sentence for nine men out of every ten. The combination of brutality, overwork, and disease was enough to ensure that most of the convicts died quickly. The fact was that Myonides' death was almost as much of a shock to him as Rufus' death had been, though in quite a different way. Where he had felt — and still did feel — an overwhelming load of guilt for the death of Rufus, when he heard of the death of Myonides he was overcome with a sense of escape from disaster. Rufus would not have died if Cedonius had not behaved in such a way as to bring the little man to Sardinia in the first place. Myonides he had intended to kill, but for reasons which he still could not understand he had not been able to do so when it came to the point; and now Myonides was dead. If Cedonius had killed him, he would merely have forestalled events by a few months, but he would have had to carry the guilt for the man's murder all his life. He knew only too well that he had not refrained from using that broken pickaxe because of any innate virtue in himself. He had simply been unable to do what every impulse in him had been urging him to do; and now, in retrospect, the depth of the abyss upon the edge of which he had been balancing was revealed to him in all its darkness and horror.

Outwardly life in the penal settlement went on without apparent change; but for Cedonius the transformation that had begun before Rufus' death was now complete, and he saw that life as a setting in which he could enter deeply into the pattern of the present moment in search of the will of God. Myonides had finally cured him of his ingrained habit of self-reliance. He had discovered at last

that self-reliance was equivalent to reliance upon nothing; whereas reliance upon God, which looked exactly like reliance upon nothing, was the only reliance worth talking about. A by-product of this transformation was Cedonius' acceptance of every circumstance of life in the camp. He no longer even dreamed of freedom, and he completely gave up the habit of constructing fantasies in which, by some miracle, he was released and sent back to Italy. Instead he prayed a great deal.

Then one evening, when he had been in the mines for about three years, one of the camp guards came to the hut. Since it was unusual for such a thing to happen, when the man came through the door the convicts fell silent. The guard looked slowly round the room at the assembled men until he saw Marcus.

"You!" he said, quietly. "You're wanted by the Commandant."

"Are you talking to me?" Marcus said in his deep voice.

"Who do you think I'm talking to? Yes, I mean you. Come on. Don't keep the Commandant waiting."

Marcus got up and went with the guard.

Cedonius was worried. If it was unusual for a guard to come to one of the huts in the evening, it was unprecedented for the Commandant to disturb himself at such an hour. Cedonius was afraid that somehow news of Marcus' celebration of the Eucharist must have reached the authorities. If this were the case, it was unlikely that Marcus would return, for his punishment would be drastic and immediate. Cedonius wondered what measures would be taken against the rest of them. It seemed unlikely that the death penalty would be imposed upon all who had

taken part in the Eucharist, because, for one thing, there was a temporary shortage of men in the penal settlement, and it seemed unlikely that the authorities would wish to reduce their available labor force even further; but certainly if the clandestine celebrations had been discovered everyone who had taken part in them would be made to suffer in one way or another.

Marcus was away for about twenty minutes. When he returned he came into the hut looking heavy and dull, and the guard slammed the door behind him. No one said anything. They sat quite still, and Marcus walked slowly to the middle of the hut, his bare feet making a hardly perceptible noise in the silence as he moved across the earth floor. It was impossible to interpret the expression on the big man's face; it was just blank and heavy. Even his arms hung loosely by his sides with an apparent dullness and purposelessness not characteristic of him.

After a moment one of the men said, "Well, Marcus. Did you see the Commandant?"

Marcus stood motionless in the center of the room. Then, slowly, he turned his head toward the man who had spoken to him; his hands still hung idly by his sides.

"Yes," he replied. "I saw him."

There was another silence. Some of the men had begun to fidget.

"What did he want? Is there trouble coming?"

Marcus looked at the floor. He stooped and picked up a little pellet of mud, which he rolled between his thumb and forefinger, looking at it as though it absorbed him. Automatically everyone in the room began to gaze at Marcus' hand, as his thumb and forefinger moved in little

circles one against the other, and again there was complete silence.

"No, it's not trouble exactly," Marcus said slowly in his deep voice. "I hardly know how to tell you what it is."

"Come on," someone said.

"We are going to be released," Marcus said.

Deliberately and carefully he dropped the little pellet of dust onto the ground, opening his thumb and forefinger and watching it fall. The men sat silently gazing at the spot on the floor where the dust pellet had fallen. It was getting dark outside, and the windows framed a sky turned to the color of ashes. Inside the hut it was difficult to discern the expressions on the faces of the men.

"'We?'" said the first man who had spoken. "Whom do you mean by 'we?'"

"I mean us," Marcus replied. "Christians. An order has arrived to release all Christians. I thought it was a joke at first, but it isn't. That's all I know. We are going to be released. That's all."

PART III

FOR ABOUT seven years the Imperial Household in Rome had been dominated by a young woman called Marcia. The Emperor Commodus adored her. She had attracted his notice for the first time in the year 183, when she had been largely instrumental in exposing a conspiracy to assassinate him, in which his sister, Lucilla, and his cousin, Quadratus, had been prime movers. Marcia had played her cards well, and after the elimination of Lucilla and Quadratus she had become the Emperor's concubine. In all but name she had become his Empress, and all the honors due to an acknowledged Empress had been granted to her; coins had been struck which displayed her figure in the garb of an Amazon, and Commodus himself had taken the title of *Amazonius*. It had not taken Marcia long to become all-powerful. Anyone who wished for imperial favor paid homage, first, to Marcia.

This young woman was of humble origin. Left an orphan, she had been brought up by a Christian priest who had taken pity on her. At the age of sixteen she had been admitted to the Imperial Household as a slave, largely be-

cause of her good looks, and she had left the care of her guardian. However, he had retained a high place in her confidence and affection, and when she had suddenly become the power behind the throne, her former protector had become the *éminence grise* behind her. This man had not persuaded her against her will to use her influence with the Emperor to release the Christians. Rather, she herself had been inclined to do it, because she was fond of him and he was a Christian. She had told him one day that she might suggest it to Commodus, but he had been skeptical of her chances of success. He had told her that he doubted whether her influence, great as it undoubtedly was, was great enough to induce the Emperor to act in a manner quite contrary to Roman law, and he had tried to dissuade her from the attempt, lest she might jeopardize her own position by doing so. This had nettled Marcia, and what had begun as a casual idea had become almost an obsession. She had come to look upon her success or failure as a crucial test of her own power.

She set about the affair intelligently and with subtlety. Commodus, who although physically tough was also a sentimental debauchee, was in the habit of expressing his devotion to her in such words as "There is nothing I would not do for you, my love. I am your little imperial slave; not you, mine." Such remarks were part of Commodus' taste for self-abasement, and he made them most commonly when Marcia was dressed in the way he liked most — as an Amazon. She was too clever to spoil her chances of success by excessive haste, and for months she contented herself with replying in a matter-of-fact way, "I've never heard such nonsense. There are dozens of things you

wouldn't do for me." When Commodus, in paroxysms of affection, pressed her to give him an example, swearing by the beauty of her little bare feet that he would prove her to be mistaken, she merely laughed, running her fingers through his hair and saying, "Silly boy! One day you'll see that I'm right."

She chose her time with great care. For a week she kept away from Commodus on the pretext of illness. Commodus, who was unaccustomed to sleeping alone, did not enjoy her absence. He tried to console himself with a red-headed girl from Aquitania, but she proved a poor substitute for Marcia. She was only too obviously in awe of the Emperor. What Commodus enjoyed was pretending to be frightened of his mistress. The result was that when Marcia, his delicious Amazon, reappeared one morning at breakfast, he was more than usually delighted to see her, and he drank a little too much white wine. As usual, he tried to prove his devotion to her by making extravagant promises and by assuring her that there was nothing he would not do for her.

"What a ridiculous little boy you are," Marcia said with a smile as she nibbled an olive. "You're always saying that you'll give me the moon or cut off your right hand, and I keep on having to tell you that you are talking nonsense. I shall get cross with you, if you're not careful."

She took the sting out of her words by leaning across and kissing his ear, and as she had expected, the mock severity of her reproof only encouraged Commodus to redouble the extravagance of his promises. In the end, simulating loss of patience, she turned to him and said, "Oh, do stop being so absurd! Good heavens! I can think of

endless things which you wouldn't do for me. Such talk is just silly. For instance, you wouldn't give me the whole province of Dalmatia as a gift, would you now? Or let everyone out of prison on my birthday? It would only need a word from you, but you wouldn't do it. Of course you wouldn't. I don't suppose you'd even release one class of prisoners for me — the Christians, for example — even though such a thing would mean nothing to you at all; it would be a mere gesture. So let's have no more empty talk of doing anything for me, or I shall be really cross with you, as I promised."

Marcia thoroughly enjoyed recounting this scene and her triumph to the priest. The man did not believe her at first.

"But it's true," she said, almost dancing with amusement. "In less than ten minutes he signed an Imperial Edict for their release. You should have seen the face of the old Senator whom he summoned to the palace. Poor old man! I thought he was going to have apoplexy. He kept on saying, 'But, Sir, you can't . . .' 'I *can't!*' yelled Commodus, assuming his gladiatorial pose. 'You dare to say, sir, that the Emperor *can't!*' Poor old man! He was *terrified*."

Marcia had passed her own test. She had proved to herself that her power over Commodus was as absolute as she had thought it to be, and, moreover, she had proved it to the satisfaction of her guardian, who had originally doubted it. The pleasure she derived from her little triumph lasted only about a week before it began to wear off; but the pleasure, if such a word can be used, which her little triumph gave to thousands of Christians in prison camps all over the Empire, was not enjoyed until some

little time after that week had elapsed. Even Imperial Edicts took time to reach their destinations, and before the Christians in Sardinia were released, Marcia had nearly forgotten the amusement the affair had afforded her.

It took Marcus and Cedonius nearly six weeks to get back to Rome. No arrangements had been made for the repatriation of the convicts, who were left to find their own means of returning to their homes.

Marcus and Cedonius traveled together. They went straight to Calares, but it was difficult to find a ship in need of men, and they could not pay for their passage. For a month they worked as dock laborers and eventually they were engaged by the master of a ship in which two men had fallen ill on the outward voyage. When they reached Italy, it was raining. They stayed one night in Portus and then walked to Rome, where Marcus reported to the Pope.

Two days later, Marcus told Cedonius that the Pope wanted to see him. Cedonius, who was still in a state of uncertainty about his future, was startled.

"He's already seen *you*," Cedonius said. "I can't tell him any more about Sardinia than you have already told him, so why does he want to see me?"

Marcus, however, was vague; he did not know why Victor wished to see Cedonius; all he knew was that he had asked to see him.

The Pope lived in a villa without a garden in a part of Rome inhabited by tradesmen and the middle classes. He was a lively little man with sharp, friendly eyes, and he reminded Cedonius of a sparrow. He was neat, quick, and

perky. He asked Cedonius about his past life and watched him as he talked. Cedonius had changed much during the last few years. He was no longer handsome, confident, and overbearing with the arrogance of self-reliance as he had been in the old days. He was rather a gaunt-looking man with a certain quietness of voice and stillness of body which gave the impression of a gentleness that at first sight was difficult to reconcile with his emaciated and rather forbidding face. He was both unapproachable and approachable; the calmness of the man invited confidence. The account that he gave of himself to Victor was an honest one; he did not try to conceal his past arrogance, or to excuse the former insincerity of his profession as a Christian. In particular, he blamed himself for the death of Rufus. He had passed the stage when he could talk or think of his responsibility for Rufus' death only with an almost unbearable bitterness and self-reproach. Now he was objective about it, still condemning himself, but no longer with bitterness, for he had accepted his own shortcomings, and he no longer fought with pride against acknowledging to himself that he was a sinner; but he knew, too, that he was not unique in this respect, and that Christ had died for sinners.

Victor listened attentively without interrupting. When Cedonius had finished, the two men sat in silence for a little while.

"And what are you going to do now?" Victor asked him, lifting his head with a little jerky movement, and smiling across at Cedonius in an offhand way.

"I don't know," Cedonius replied. "That's the trouble; I have no idea what to do. I suppose perhaps I'd better

go back to the man Hypatius. After all, I am still a slave."

Victor got up and rubbed his small hands together.

"Yes, you could do that, of course," he said. "But I'm not sure that it's the best thing to do." He walked across to the window and stood looking out into the street. "I am not sure that you should not continue in the prison camp," he went on, with his back to Cedonius.

Cedonius looked up sharply, but the little man was still looking out of the window.

"What do you mean?" Cedonius asked, not understanding.

Victor turned round, and walked back across the room.

"Don't misunderstand me," he said. "I am not suggesting that you should return to Sardinia even if you could, though I phrased my suggestion in rather a misleading manner. But the mines are not the only prison camp, you know. In a very real sense the whole Church is a prison camp. We are locked up in this rather out-of-joint world, and however much we should like to escape from it, we can't choose the times, and the seasons. We are locked up in it for the love and the service of Christ. Have you ever thought of it that way?"

"No, I haven't," Cedonius replied.

"No, I don't suppose you have," Victor went on in his brightest and most businesslike tone of voice. "After all, you've not had much time to think about such things, have you? You have only been a practising Christian for such a short time. It is natural that you should feel lost now, for you have only known the Church as it existed in the persons of the Christians who were with you in the mines; and now that you are no longer there — no longer

with them—the Church seems to have ceased to exist for you. Am I right?”

“Yes, more or less,” Cedonius said.

“What I think that you have got to discover now,” Victor said, “is that there are Christians in the world too. What’s more, they are as little of the world as your friends in Sardinia were of the camp. They are in it, but not of it; and they are as much in need as you were in Sardinia of the solidarity, the love, and the care, which come only by the grace of God; and they are as much in need of the lives of men as you were once in need of the life of your friend Rufus.”

Victor rubbed his hands, and walked across to the window again.

“Marcus has told me a good deal about you,” he continued. “I think that you should forget that you have been released by the Emperor. You should try to remember that you have not been released by God. If you do this, you can look upon the whole world just as you looked upon the prison camp, and you can go on living in and for the Church, in bondage to the suffering flesh of Christ. For that is what we are, you know,” he said, turning from the window toward Cedonius. “We talk of ourselves as members of Christ’s body, and as such we are his flesh and blood. I should like you to become a priest.”

Cedonius felt that the veil which had been before his eyes since his release from the prison camp had been momentarily lifted. The clarity and the sharp focus in which he had lived his life since Rufus’ death, and which had seemed blurred since leaving Sardinia, had returned. For the first time he had a vision of the world in the same

hard sharp light that had illuminated and transformed the misery of the mines; for the first time he saw the greater life of the free world not as a gray, monotonous panorama of pointless endurance, of getting and spending, of fame and failure, of dreary living and unwelcome dying, but as the shining arena in which Christ was proclaimed, and in which the body of God was redeeming the waste and the squalor and the ugliness of egoism and death. Moreover, deep down within himself he knew the truth of the paradox of life in Christ; he himself was nothing — absolutely nothing at all — and yet, just because he was nothing, he could take part in this redemptive process.

"I will do whatever you think best," he said.

Victor beamed and walked briskly over to his chair.

"Good! I am delighted," he said.

"And Hypatius?" Cedonius asked.

"I will arrange matters with Hypatius," Victor replied a little dryly. "In the meanwhile, you will be paid a little by the Church. I should like you to go to Antium with Marcus and work with him there."

When Cedonius had gone, Victor sat in silence for a long time. He was sixty-seven years of age, and all his life he had been an observer of the ways of God with men. Yet even now they never failed to surprise him. Just when he was beginning to think that he understood a little of God's working — that he could recognize the men whom God would choose — someone entirely unexpected turned up to destroy his conceit. It was incredible that God had chosen to himself this great, arrogant, boastful, talented, overweening slave, and had transformed him — battered him — into the stuff of sanctity. But it was always the

same; God never did the obvious thing, and never chose the obviously suitable people. It was a humbling realization.

Victor sighed. "If I must glory, I will glory in the things that concern my weakness," he murmured to himself.

At the end of the second century Antium was a fashionable seaside resort. One hundred and fifty years previously, Nero had built a small and extremely elegant summer palace on the front; and his example had been sufficient to start a boom in the building industry in Antium. Now the coast was fringed with villas, most of which were closed during the winter months, but to which many of the richer citizens of Rome came with their families for the summer. Some people kept a staff of slaves on the premises all the year round. It was only the very rich who could afford to do this, and most householders brought their servants with them from Rome when they migrated to the sea.

It was a charming town, sufficiently far away from the Pontine marshes to be free from the fever that made the small towns farther south unpopular as holiday resorts. Unlike Portus Augusti thirty miles to the northwest, it was lucky too in not having any small local marshes near it. But Cedonius soon discovered that in addition to the households of the rich there was a large population of small traders, businessmen, people in the entertainment trade, luxury shopkeepers, and workmen who lived there to cater to the wealthy families. On the surface, the life of the town seemed entirely delightful. Had it been possible for a visitor from another age to step back into

this sample of Roman society for a moment, he would have been charmed by its elegance, envious of its leisure, and satiated with its luxury; but if the same visitor had been allowed to stay long enough to discover what lay beneath this charming crust of pink and white icing, he would not have been so pleased.

As priests, Marcus and Cedonius were mostly concerned with what lay beneath the surface. Here they found the old and the infirm, the crippled and the poor, the slaves and the prostitutes, the mean and the cruel, the disillusioned, the diseased, and the dying; but, above all, they found men and women living without purpose and without hope. For most of them life was a matter of surviving the endless succession of days and enduring the pointless hours of drudgery and exploitation. The society in which they lived was borne on their shoulders, but they had no stake in it. They were there simply to uphold it, until they were crushed by it. When that happened, nobody minded, for there were always more people to take their places. Fortunately for the Roman Empire, the poor bred well. Moreover, this society they lived in was both too big and too impersonal to command their interest. It moved like some juggernaut with a motion of its own, upon which the efforts of the individuals who composed it seemed to have no effect, and the course of events seemed to be in the power of forces beyond the control of anyone: man, woman, or god. Of course, the old gods no longer commanded either the respect or the belief of the people. Members of the upper class were always deploring the irreligion of the masses, but they themselves did not really believe in the gods; they merely wished to resuscitate a

popular belief in them, because a return to religion would have been desirable politically and socially. They wanted to use the gods to underpin the vast and rickety structure Rome had built upon the face of the known world. But the servile population was not interested in a pantheon inhabited by a society of gods not easily distinguishable from the Roman upper class. Under these circumstances, to the men and women who had been dispossessed of everything, including hope, nothing mattered but the pleasures of the moment, and a wise man saw to it that he satisfied himself in whatever ways he was able — even at almost any cost in suffering to others, for the poor had little love for each other. The only thing that they shared was the misfortune of being born in servitude. The idea of servile solidarity only entered the heads of frightened politicians, to whom it was a constant nightmare, but it never occurred to the slaves themselves. They were far too interested in gaining an advantage over the next man to play with absurd and impractical ideas of unity. So the society in which Marcus and Cedonius lived and worked was a hotchpotch of private greeds and personal lusts, with only the very thinnest of crusts upon the surface; and this crust was only maintained by force.

Such was the society in which it became Cedonius' business to proclaim Christ: Christ, the Son of God, who had come down from heaven for the sake of all men and for their salvation. As long as lusts were easily satisfied, as long as human intelligence and scheming continued to pay dividends, as long as a man could subsist upon the stilts of his own pride and self-respect, as long as his money or his muscle procured him power and fame and blindness to

every ultimate issue, the proclamation of Christ either went unheard or was greeted with scorn as a vulgar farce, and those who proclaimed him were driven from hole to corner and from gallows to stake. But when secular idolatries began to fail, those who relied upon such things always found men like Marcus and Cedonius at hand with the gospel. It was at such times that men suddenly began to see the world as a prison camp and themselves as prisoners in it, and then the small and ridiculous community of Christians, which they had been accustomed to despise as a band of slavish criminals, no longer looked so silly. Instead, it took on the luster and the glory of the body of Christ, and it seemed to shine, as Christ's body had once shone on the top of a hill in Galilee. It was in such a time that men turned to the Church, and because the conditions in which they lived were bad, the collapse and failure of their idolatries was almost inevitable in the long run. So Marcus and Cedonius were busy, and the Church was growing.

Cedonius lived with Marcus in the top floor of a house in a poor district at the back of the town. Even if they had wished to do so, they would not have been able to afford to live in a house near the sea; but, in any case, they preferred to live among the people who formed the greater part of the Church in Antium, and this meant living in the slums. The house was ramshackled and dirty, and the lower floors were occupied by three different families. On the ground floor there was a fisherman and his wife and four children. The man was very seldom at home, for he spent nearly all his time waist-deep in the sea, hauling a net along behind him. He could not afford

a boat, but in this way he managed to catch enough to keep his family. He spent so much of his time immersed in the water that his legs and feet were swollen and puffy, and were beginning to rot. His wife was a pretty dark girl who had been born in a village in the Volscian hills. She always looked tired, and she was beginning to lose her figure. Marcus, who was fond of children and was good with them, spent an hour with them from time to time.

On the next floor two families lived. There was a middle-aged man who made his living as an acrobat and juggler. His wife was dead, but he had two boys, of twelve and sixteen respectively, whom he was training in his own profession. During the winter months they were often away, touring the towns and villages of Latium and Campania, where they performed in the streets and in market places. The winter was always a lean time for these people, for they were dependent upon the casual charity of passers-by; but during the summer they did well, for they performed on the beach at Antium during the day and quite often they were engaged as postprandial entertainers when there was a dinner party in one of the big villas.

Opposite them, in two more rooms, there was a young couple with three children under the age of five. The young woman's mother lived with them; so did one of the husband's brothers. All the adults in the family worked as laborers in a nursery garden. They set out early in the morning, complete with children, and only returned late in the evening. During the day, while they worked, the children were left by the side of the field to look after themselves as best they could.

The top floor, on which Cedonius and Marcus lived,

was really an attic. There were two small rooms, and when it rained the flat roof leaked a little, as Cedonius discovered when he was wakened one night by drops of water falling on his face; he had moved his mattress to the other corner of the room, where it was dry. He liked the place. There was a window to the north through which he could see the Alban hills standing up against the sky. They were fifteen or sixteen miles away, but on a clear day — and most days were clear — he could see the little white farmhouses shining in the sun on the terraced foothills. Before rain, the wavy ridge of Mount Albanus with its triple peak grew as dark as a damson, and was silhouetted against the sky as sharply as though pasted to a backcloth. Because it faced north, the room was cool, and a thick layer of faggots and dry grass on the roof kept the sun off, and made it even cooler.

The real advantage of living here was that the other inhabitants of the house were all Christians. Finding it had been a stroke of luck. When they had first arrived in Antium, neither Marcus nor Cedonius had known the place. They had been greeted by a deacon, and he had taken them to see the priest whom they had been sent to help. He was a sick man, and so had made no arrangements for their arrival. They had lived with him for a time, but he only had one room, in which there was hardly enough space for the three of them to sleep. When they had been there for about a fortnight, Marcus had seen the acrobat and his two sons performing in one of the small squares near the Temple of Fortune, and he had remembered the man. Before his condemnation to the mines in Sardinia, Marcus had known him slightly in

Rome, and he knew that he was a Christian. So Cedonius and Marcus had moved into the attics above the acrobat and his family. For a time they had taken turns sleeping at the house of the other priest, for he had been too ill to be left alone; but at the end of six weeks he had died, and they had both slept in the new house.

For the unfortunate and the underprivileged Cedonius had a deep and easy love, because he never forgot his earlier life in Hypatius' house. Nor was the memory of the ugly, weak little body of Rufus ever far from his mind. He had a ready sympathy with the terror that led to apostasy and with the weakness that led to sexual sin. Unlike many of his more rigorous contemporaries, he was quite unable to believe that such things finally cut a man off from God's love and forgiveness. But among the well-to-do Christians there were some who reminded him so much of Hypatius that he never felt entirely at his ease with them. One man in particular, a certain Synadius, a retired wool merchant who had bought a small villa on the sea front in which the Eucharist was very often celebrated, Cedonius almost hated. The man fancied himself as rather a theologian. In Rome, before his retirement, he had been an intimate friend of Hippolytus, the leader of the rigorist party in the Church. Synadius was none too kind to those who worked for him, and he was always extremely eager to draw Cedonius' attention to any and every failing in other people. His favorite topic was the "menace of laxity." "Laxity" was a portmanteau term of abuse which, for him, covered all the ideas of his theological opponents; especially the ideas of those people who wished for some lessening of rigidity and severity in the Church's treat-

ment of sinners. To Synadius, Christianity was a code of rigid perfectionism, and the smallest suggestion that those who fell short of its standards might be forgiven by God, and therefore by the Church, was anathema. To Cedonius, on the other hand, forgiveness — almost unlimited forgiveness — was of the essence of the faith, for he had experienced it; if he had not done so, he would never have been where and what he was.

As the years went by and Cedonius worked and lived in the darkness, the squalor, and the hopelessness upon which the glittering superstructure of Roman society was built, he discovered that there were things harder to endure than the privations and the dangers of life in Sardinia. Although there was always the danger of persecution, although he never knew from moment to moment whether someone with a grudge against him might not denounce him to the authorities as a Christian, and although he knew that every surreptitious celebration of the Eucharist might be his last, he discovered that the fear of death was nothing in comparison to the agonies of doubt he suffered when everything that he was doing suddenly seemed useless, pointless, and idiotic. For there were times when his task seemed impossible, and when the Church seemed to be an absurd gathering of deluded and neurotic escapist. How could so few Christians possibly effect the redemption of the world? How could they, for that matter, even modify the ugliness, the oppression, the brutality, and the cynical despair of the Empire? Looked at objectively, the Church was composed of the most ridiculous mixture of insignificant oddments; there were the men like Synadius who flocked to the banner of Hippolytus, spending their

time in bad-tempered invective and pledging themselves to a bigoted conservatism. Then there were their opponents, who wished to take experiment to the very edge of chaos. Between them, these rival factions had turned the Roman world in general, and Rome in particular, into a bloodless, but none the less bitter, battlefield. Worse perhaps than these, there were the ambitious and the pushing: the climbers who were using the Church as a ladder upon which they might jostle their way to eminence and win worldly distinction. Finally, on the ground floor, there were the ordinary Christians: men and women like the acrobat with his two sons, and the fisherman's wife from the Volscian hills with her tired eyes and her young bosom, which was already beginning to droop. It was fantastic to suppose that these people could have any ultimate effect upon the course of history. Even the remembrance of Rufus, as brittle and as broken as a small dead bird, sometimes seemed to Cedonius to be a futile and utterly insignificant thing, and the weakness and absurdity of the Church overwhelmed him with a sour and apathetic despair. Intellectually, he knew quite well that the people who made up the Church, though powerless of themselves, were able to do all things by the grace of God; but there were times when this seemed to be an empty and an unconvincing formula, and when the grace of God seemed to be a delusion: a mere nothing, a word descriptive of no reality. It was only slowly and with much discomfort that he learned that these periods of disillusion, when God seemed to be dead, were a part of God's way with men. It was only after a long time that he learned it was by the sterility of his prayers, by the emptiness of his communion with

God, and by this apparent withdrawal of God that his faith and his strength and his power for good were being forged into a flexible instrument of steel from the soft, unreliable iron of his first enthusiasm. When he had learned this lesson, the pettiness of Synadius, the complete insignificance of the acrobat and of the tired girl from the Volscian hills, and the weakness of Rufus once again looked like the weakness of the God who had died helpless on a cross; and he remembered that Saint Paul had known long ago that "not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called; but God chose the foolish things of the world, that he might put to shame them that are wise; and God chose the weak things of the world that he might put to shame the things that are strong . . . that no flesh should glory before God." It seemed that neither God nor his Church had changed since Saint Paul's day.

In the winter of A.D. 196, when Cedonius had been at Antium for six years, there was one of those sporadic anti-Christian panics that flared up from time to time. They could never be predicted. For years the Church would be left in comparative peace, although there was always the chance that a few of its members would suffer, as Cedonius and Rufus had suffered. In general Christians would be left alone so long as they were careful to meet in a discreet obscurity. But at any moment storm clouds might gather in a blue sky, and the thunder and lightning of official persecution and popular hysteria would strike the Church with the senseless violence of a summer storm. On the whole the hysteria of the mob was much more

dangerous than the more objective and controlled hostility of the government, for the latter acted only on proof, whereas the former were actuated by a fear of imaginary dangers. The most unlikely rumors were sufficient to start a persecution, for the gullibility and the credulousness of the people were heavily reinforced by a deep-seated fear and a long-standing hatred of the Christians. It was understandable that such a hatred should have arisen and continued in the minds of many people, for mankind has a great propensity for believing the gruesome, the horrifying, and the disgusting, and such interested parties as the priests of other religions were not above encouraging anti-Christian sentiment. At all times there were a few people in the Church who were distinguished more for their volubility than for their discretion, and ill-timed talk of receiving "the Body and the Blood" led to fantastic suspicions of ritual murder and cannibalistic rites, while the Christian habit of referring to other members of the Church as "brothers and sisters" gave rise to horrifying rumors of orgies of promiscuous vice and even of incest. Such reports were believed, not only by the ignorant and the stupid, but by hundreds of educated and reasonable citizens as well. When a rumor began to spread that a Christian Eucharist had taken place in a town, it was often sufficient to release a hysterical wave of terror and loathing; parents would not allow their daughters to go out after sunset; and they themselves would hurry home, keeping to the shadows, avoiding the moonlight, and casting quick, frightened glances back over their shoulders, lest the murderous, blood-drinking Christians should leap upon them

from a dark corner or drag them suddenly into a doorway and carry them off as sacrificial victims for their bestial rites. There were always people who were prepared to swear that they had actually caught glimpses of such rites in progress, so that when Christian slaves, broken under torture, wearily "confessed" to whatever their tormentors wished them to confess, the additional evidence of Christian bestiality thus provided merely added to the decent citizen's disgust, but hardly at all to his conviction that the Church should be rooted out and destroyed at any cost, for this conviction was too strong to need any strengthening. What made this particularly disastrous for the Church, and put it so much at the mercy of its enemies, was the fact that the idea of saving itself by celebrating the Eucharist very seldom, or not at all, never occurred to anyone, for the idea was unthinkable. It was the Eucharist which made the Church what it was. But Christians did not risk death in order to satisfy a mere desire for subjective piety or devotional emotion; the Eucharist was bare and unemotional to the point of dullness; and they did not meet merely to make their communion, although this was an inalienable part of the whole eucharistic action. It was an unquestioned conviction that the gathering of the Church for the Eucharist was essential to its life which brought men and women to the meeting places under cover of darkness, under the threat of persecution and death, at all times and in all places, in season and out of season, without regard to the consequences. So men and women came, and men and women died for their coming; and no other procedure was ever so much as contemplated.

It was just such a wave of public hysteria that broke upon the Church in Antium that winter. The majority of the wealthy inhabitants of the large villas had returned to Rome, and the town had settled down to the usual period of quietness and temporary poverty to which it was accustomed in winter. Then one morning the body of a twelve-year-old girl was found on the dunes just behind the beach. She was naked, and she had been atrociously mutilated. In itself such an event was not at all unusual, for crimes of this sort were commonplace, and no one — not even the police — felt much concern about them. For one thing, it was usually impossible to trace the murderer, and for another, the life of one slave girl here or there did not make much difference to anybody. Her master might object to the loss of his property, but since masters themselves were not always above treating their slaves in much the same way, their complaints did not carry very much weight with the police, who shrugged and promised, without any very serious intention of keeping their promise, that they would do what lay in their power to avenge the crime. The victim of the crime at Antium, however, was in a different category: she was the youngest daughter of a patrician who had remained rather longer than usual in the town because his wife had been unwell for some weeks, and he had not wanted to tire her by letting her make the journey to Rome. He had been on the point of returning to the capital, when his daughter's body was found early one morning by some fishermen as they were going to their boats. Since the child's father was not the kind of man to allow the matter to sink into oblivion

to the accompaniment of shrugged shoulders and polite commiserations, the police were galvanized into a frenzied, if wholly ineffective, activity.

For some weeks the murder was the talk of the town. The fishermen who had discovered the body were questioned again and again, and for a time it looked as though the police meant to make one of them the scapegoat for the crime. The town was searched for anyone who might have been walking by the shore during the night of the murder, and rewards were promised to people who came forward with information that led to an arrest; but the first person, who went hopefully to the police with a story of having seen a thin young man with a bald head on the dunes that night, was arrested on the suspicion of being himself the criminal. He was brutally flogged in an attempt to make him confess his guilt; and when he was eventually released, more dead than alive, no one else could be found who was willing to volunteer any information at all, and it looked as though this inquiry, like most others, would die a natural death.

Then someone whispered, "The Christians!" And this little sibilant phrase swept through the town like a wind through dry grass, gathering speed and growing into a gale, as more and yet more pairs of lips hissed and clipped and framed the three innocent but lethal syllables. Within three days the town was in a panic. The slumbering antipathies and passions of the mob blazed up like fire in a haystack, and were fanned by the wind of whispers. Rumors spread like smoke, and it was not long before there were dozens of people prepared to swear to the most

extraordinary and mutually contradictory stories. The police were delighted, for it relieved them of the unpleasant necessity of admitting to the father of the murdered girl that they had failed. Enthusiastically supporting the allegations of the mob, they said that all along they had suspected the Christians were the culprits. So the mob was given a free rein, and the hunt was up.

The first incident, which showed Cedonius how serious and ugly the temper of the town was becoming, occurred a week after the anti-Christian whispering campaign had begun. It was one of those gray and dreary winter days that make the Mediterranean countries look more squalid than any other place on earth. Cedonius was returning home from the other side of the town. As he passed the Temple of Fortune in the center of the town, he noticed a small crowd of people on the steps that led to the pillared entrance to the temple. It was raining, and a thin wind was blowing from the sea, whistling round the corners of the streets, and sending the low clouds scudding eastward over the rooftops. The people on the steps of the temple were clustered together in a small, damp, windy knot that almost seemed to be blown about like a bundle of wet rags by the wind; they were struggling, and in their struggles they stumbled and vacillated on the steps. Cedonius approached them and saw that they were mostly youths, in whose midst a man with a short stubbly white beard, beaded with rain, was throwing his arms about in a violent effort to get free of the young men who were surrounding him. Red in the face, he kept shouting, "But I'm not, I tell you. Let me go! I'm nothing of the kind. Let

me go! Let me go!" Cedonius went up to a man standing near the bottom of the steps and asked him what was happening.

"They think they've caught a Christian," the man replied.

Cedonius looked again at the man with the white beard. He had never seen him before in his life, and he knew that he could not be a Christian. Two of the youths were beating the old man on the shoulders with their fists. Their lips were compressed, and there was a look on their faces which Cedonius remembered having seen on the faces of the foremen in Sardinia. It sat badly on the faces of these seventeen-year-old boys.

"Why do they think that he's a Christian?" Cedonius asked the man beside him.

"I don't know, I'm sure," he replied, shaking his head. "They seem to think so anyway. I don't like it. Things are getting out of hand, if you ask me. This isn't the only gang that is going round the town beating people up; I saw another near the cornmarket earlier this morning; they'd got a woman they were dragging off to the police. It won't be safe for anyone, if things go on like this."

He ran his hand over his badly shaven chin, wiping the rain off the dark bristles and looking at his wet palm with a worried, pink face.

"These devilish Christians!" he added, rather inconsequently. "Someone's got to stop them."

The gang of youths had forced the old man off the steps of the temple, and were hurrying him along the wet street that led up to the center of the town. As they passed

out of sight, Cedonius turned and walked on.

When he got home, he found Marcus there. He was wet, and his big face looked worried and dark.

"They have got Fortunata," Marcus said.

Fortunata was the fisherman's wife: the tired girl from the Volscian hills. Cedonius picked up a towel, and began to dry his hair and face.

"Who have got her?" he asked, rubbing his head.

"The police," Marcus said, and sat down on Cedonius' bed. "She went off to the cornmarket early this morning to get some vegetables for the family and as she was coming away a gang of toughs caught up with her, and asked her to swear an anti-Christian oath. Ascylos was there and saw it all. Apparently she told them not to be silly, saying something like, 'Go on with you. I've no time for such nonsense,' and one of them hit her across the face. Her vegetables spilled into the mud, and they began to pick them up and pelt her with them, laughing and shouting abuse at her. When she slipped and fell down into the gutter, two of them kicked her until she got up again, and Ascylos heard one of them say, 'Nonsense, is it, you Christian bitch? We'll see what the police say about that'; and they dragged her off to the police. Ascylos followed. He saw the whole thing."

Cedonius finished drying his neck. He felt sick with anger and compassion. Fortunata had had big tired eyes with rings of shadow underneath them; with so many children and so little money she had never had much time for rest.

"Ascylos didn't interfere?" he asked Marcus.

"He couldn't. It wouldn't have done any good; there

were too many of them. They would have dragged him off to the police too."

"And there is no news of her since then?" he asked.

"No," Marcus replied. "We shan't know anything for a while."

Cedonius went over to the window. Mount Albanus was blotted out by the driving rain, and he looked over a vista of dripping roofs. In the distance a row of poplars bent and waved in the gray wind. Only two courses of action were open to Fortunata now: either she could choose to deny her faith, or she could admit it, and take the consequences. These consequences would include prolonged torture followed by a quick death; but under the torture she could give a great many names and addresses to the police if she was sufficiently broken. That it would be prolonged Cedonius had little doubt, for there were probably men in the police, as elsewhere, to whom the prospect of beating up a young woman, even if her figure had begun to fade a little, would be by no means unattractive. Cedonius knew that there was nothing that he or anyone else could do. He would have to wait, and he could pray. He wondered if Gito, her husband, had heard yet.

The day seemed long and the night longer. During the afternoon Cedonius took the sacrament to an old woman who was dying in a slum on the northern edge of the town, where it petered out into the flat coastal plain. Here at the end of the town a dismal collection of shanties built of driftwood and old sacking and daubed with mud straggled out for a hundred yards or more over a no man's land of sour grass and thin sandy soil. The

rain was drifting in gray waves over the flat plain and the wind whistled through the thin wet grass as it blew in from the sea. Bits of sacking, dark with rain, flapped on the huts. A mangy dog rushed out at Cedonius as he went by, and snapped at his heels, barking and snarling.

The old woman was lying on a pile of rags and straw in a corner of the hut. It was dark, for there were no windows, and the rain dripped through the roof in several places, and made little puddles on the hard earthen floor. Her son, a middle-aged fisherman with a thick stubble of short dark hair about an inch long, which stood upright all over his head, was sitting in another corner of the hut, whistling gently between his teeth and cracking the joints of his fingers. He got up when Cedonius came in, and stood in silence in his corner, as though embarrassed. The woman was too weak to use her hands, and Cedonius had to put the bread into her mouth. As she opened it, her lower jaw trembled and quivered uncontrollably. Cedonius leaned over her in the darkness, and said softly, "The bread of heaven in Christ Jesus." She tried to say "Amen" but her voice failed, and the only sound she made was a gurgling noise at the back of her throat. When he turned to leave, he said to the fisherman, "She died in Christ. You must thank God," and he remembered the death of Rufus. Then, as he was going, he added, "And she has missed the persecution."

On the return journey he went out of his way to pass the police barracks. It was nearly dark by the time that he got there, and the building looked ugly and forbidding. He stopped for a moment, looking at it and thinking of Fortunata. Her husband would have been told by now,

and he would be trying to answer the questions of the children. As he stood in the darkness of the buildings on the opposite side of the street, with the rain running down his neck and dripping from his hair, Cedonius prayed with an urgency that reminded him of Sardinia and of Rufus for the second time that afternoon. When he got back, Marcus was not there. He did not return until late in the evening, and he had no news of Fortunata.

She walked into the house just before noon on the following day. Some of her teeth had been kicked out while she had been lying in the gutter, her left cheek had been cut, and her arms were covered with bruises. Although she tried to hold her dress together at the shoulder, the skin of her back could be seen through the rents in the thin cloth. It was covered in wales, and the cloth was sticking to her flesh where the skin had been broken. But she had been exceptionally lucky. When the gang of toughs had handed her over to the police, she had been taken in charge and thrown into a cell. The magistrate had already gone home for the day, and was not expected to put in a further appearance until the next morning. However, two of the police, with a taste for such things, had come into her cell, grinning and carrying thin sticks in their hands. They had suggested to her that it would be better for everyone, and would save a lot of trouble, if she would confess that she was a Christian. When she had refused to say anything, they had thrown her on the floor, stripped her, and amused themselves by thrashing her until she had fainted.

The next morning, when the magistrate eventually arrived, none of the men who had dragged her to the police

on the previous day were present to accuse her. The magistrate was an elderly gentleman with a passion for the law and a great contempt for the mob, by which he meant anyone and everyone who was not a patrician by birth. He was told of the circumstances of Fortunata's arrest, and he saw at a glance that she had been maltreated. Both these things were enough to annoy him intensely. The mob had behaved just as he had always known that mobs did behave, and the police had anticipated the process of the law by taking matters into their own hands and beating the woman before she had been condemned. To crown everything, her accusers had not even taken the trouble to put in an appearance at the court. In his most icy mood, the magistrate ordered that Fortunata be brought before him and then he reprimanded the police in front of her, threatening the two men who had maltreated her with a dose of their own medicine if they should ever break the law in a similar way again. Finally, he ordered her immediate release. So Fortunata had walked home.

When Cedonius found her, she was sitting on a wooden chair, her eyes black and heavy with pain and exhaustion, while her children scrambled round her knees, crying with relief at seeing her. Cedonius sponged her back and soaked the thin material of her dress with water, until he could release it from the clots of blood to which it was sticking. As he bathed the swollen, waled flesh, he thought how fully this pattern of stripes and blood symbolized and expressed the pattern of life in the body of Christ. When anyone became a member of Christ's body he gave his flesh to be the flesh of Christ. In the days of his own flesh, Christ had soaked up into the stuff of his

body the evil, the malice, the aggression, and the lust of the world in the form of stripes; by letting the sin of the world sink into his skin and muscle and bone, he had sopped it up as a sponge sops up water, stopping it from flowing on through the world in a poisonous stream. Now that the days of his flesh were over, the Church put its flesh to work for Christ, and it was always the same work: the work of stopping the evil of the world, soaking it up, refusing to pass it on. Cedonius' hands moved gently, as he bathed away the clots of blood on the girl's back. He could not understand how he had ever thought her to be insignificant. She was the stuff of the Church: faithful, suffering, humble, putting her flesh in the way of the evil of the world, and letting it be broken for Christ's sake. The world did not stand a chance against such people as Fortunata, and the Church was composed of people like her. In her suffering and humiliation Christ was the conqueror, for the weakness of God was invincible.

The hooliganism of the gangs had alarmed the town. Many respectable citizens had been beaten up and dragged along to the police, and no one felt safe. But as one release followed another, the public changed temper. The public was quite convinced that the Christians were responsible for the murder of the girl whose body had been found on the dunes; and the people became restive as acquittals followed one another in rapid succession. The law, apparently, did not want to catch Christians. It was more concerned to vindicate its pettifogging ideas of justice than to avenge the child's death. As it happened, there was some truth in this accusation, for the magistrate

and the other senior authorities in the town were too well versed in what really went on at Christian gatherings to believe the rumors of ritual sacrifice. They held no brief for the Christians — in fact, they deplored their existence — but they knew quite well that they had not been responsible for this particular outrage, and they objected to the spread of mob law. But such judicial impartiality and moderation did not suit the public, which had succeeded in terrifying itself by its own imaginary version of the events on the dunes. The public wanted victims — Christian victims — and if the law would not provide them with what they wanted, then they were prepared to let the gangs of hooligans do so. So, after about ten days of arrests and releases, the persecution entered a new phase, and the gangs took the law into their own hands. They no longer bothered to take the people whom they accosted to the police; they dealt with them themselves.

Meanwhile the weather changed. The wind went round to the northeast, and the Empire began to freeze. It was one of those very severe cold spells that occasionally reach far enough south to cover the pools below the fountains of Rome with ice thick enough to bear the weight of a man. Antium had not known such weather for years. The spray from the sea froze on the blue leathery grass of the dunes, covering it with a crusty rime of white crystals that crackled and rustled in the wind, and the gulls flew inland to sit in miserable, huddled rows on the roofs of the houses in the town. A fisherman who tripped on a rope at the bottom of his boat and fell into the sea died of exposure, and the icy weather vied with the Christians for first place as a topic of conversation. But then a man

came forward with a story that put the Church back into the center of the limelight once more.

He was a small man with buck teeth who owned a grocer's shop. On the night of the girl's murder his eldest daughter, a girl of sixteen who had married a young fisherman during the course of the previous year, was brought to bed of a boy. Her husband had arrived at his father-in-law's shop earlier in the evening to tell him that the girl was in labor. The grocer had gone to his daughter's bedside, and had remained there until the early hours of the morning, when her son had been born. On his way back he had decided to follow the coast, and he had walked along a path on the dunes. When he was just about to turn inland, he had been astonished to see a crowd of people on the dunes ahead of him. He had approached them carefully and under cover. It was just beginning to grow light, and he had crept up to within fifty yards of them and had lain on his belly behind a dune and watched them. For a time he had not been able to understand what was going on, but when he had realized that he was witnessing a Christian sacrifice, his blood had frozen in his veins and he had been paralyzed with fright and was quite unable to move. He had seen the Christian priest sacrifice the child by slitting her throat with a knife and he had heard the girl's screams as she was butchered. The fact that the murdered girl had not had her throat cut was explained on the ground that the light was bad at the time, and other discrepancies in the story were accounted for in the same way. Apparently the crowd of Christians who had been spectators of this bloody rite had been dressed "all in black with red crosses splashed across their chests in

blood." When the little man was asked why he had not raised the alarm, he replied that he had been so frozen with terror that he had lost his senses, and had only recovered consciousness an hour or two later. For good measure, he added that the priest had had the teeth of a hyena and the claws of a bear, though he did not explain how he had managed to see these details in the half-light of dawn at a fifty-yard range. However, when he was asked why he had taken so long to come forward with his information, he scored a success by announcing that his experience had made him so ill he had taken to his bed and had remained there until three days previously. This was confirmed by his neighbors, who gave evidence to the effect that he had indeed been ill for many days.

This story electrified the town. It confirmed the darkest suspicions of the people, and it intensified their disgust with the inactivity and pusillanimous defeatism of the authorities. The panic that had swept through the town when the girl's body had first been found was fanned into a hysterical blaze, and the gangs multiplied. But they were a little more careful in choosing their victims, and they adopted a new technique. When they waylaid someone in the street, they presented him with an anti-Christian formula, and invited him to repeat it on oath. If he refused to do so, they accused him of being a Christian, and threatened to lynch him. If this still failed to persuade him to subscribe to the oath, they put their last threat into practice and manhandled the person. Such a procedure was extremely dangerous for the Christians and comparatively safe for the gangs, who on the whole managed to avoid beating up the wrong people. The great majority

of those who were stopped and asked to show their anti-Christian sentiments in this way were only too willing to do so, promptly and sincerely; and thus the number actually hurt was much smaller than before; but those few who refused to comply with the request put to them made up for their scarcity by being actual Christians.

Within the first week of this new outbreak of panic and persecution, five members of the Church in Antium were caught by the gangs in this way. How many more secretly swore the anti-Christian oath out of sheer terror and then went home to quiet their consciences as best they could, no one ever knew; but of the five who refused to do as they were told, one was killed on the spot and three more died later of the injuries inflicted on them. Only one person, a young slave in Synadius' household, recovered from the treatment he had received.

"You will not find laxity in my house," Synadius said to Cedonius with a mournful pride, as they stood over the boy's bed on the evening of the day when he had been brought back to the house, unconscious and covered with blood. "Lycas is a good lad. I am not surprised that he stood up for the truth and refused to repeat the filth that these hooligans are forcing people to say."

Cedonius suddenly realized that he liked Synadius. He saw for the first time that underneath his ill temper and his narrow, partisan ideas there lay a loyalty to the Church which nothing could destroy. Should Synadius be stopped by one of the roaming bands, it would never even occur to him that there was any alternative to spitting in the faces of those who were trying to force him to betray the faith. Although he was bigoted, uncharitable, and blinded by

his own theological prejudices, he was utterly dedicated to the way of Christ as he saw it. It was simply because of the strength of this dedication that he was so bitterly opposed to those people in the Church who seemed to be jeopardizing its priceless inheritance. He was unimaginative, rather than unkind; it never occurred to him that his opponents might be right, and that he might be wrong: that the "lax" by their innovations might be concerned to preserve the way of Christ as surely as he was himself, and that their methods might be more effective than those of the rigorists.

"No," said Cedonius. "Lycas would never have given in. But wouldn't it be better to send him somewhere else for the time being—out of the town, preferably? If he is traced to your house, it will be awkward."

"Awkward!" Synadius said, more in indignation than in surprise. "Send him away! Nothing would induce me to do any such thing. The boy will stay here where he belongs, and if anyone comes looking for him, I shall know how to deal with him. It's perfectly monstrous that citizens should be intimidated by this rowdyism. I don't know why the police don't put a stop to it. They're getting lax; that's the trouble."

For the first time for a fortnight, Cedonius laughed.

"You could call in the police," he said, still laughing; but Synadius was not amused.

About a week later, there was an incident that promised to put a stop to the activity of the gangs. An elderly man was accosted and asked to subscribe to the usual anti-Christian oath. He was a respectable old gentleman who disliked the Christians as much as anyone disliked them;

but he disliked even more the outbreak of mob law. Since he was a retired lawyer, who had come to Antium to end his days there, his attitude was understandable. So, when he was presented with an ultimatum by the leader of the particular gang that had surrounded him, he refused on principle to capitulate to a threat he considered to be a menace to the security of society almost as pernicious as the illegal assembly of Christians. He began to address his assailants to this effect, but they did not give him time to finish what he was saying. The leader, a thin man of about twenty-seven with bad teeth and a hard, sour little face, hit the old man in the nape of the neck, much as one would kill a rabbit, and knocked him to the ground. When they left him, he was dead.

The old lawyer had been quite well known in the town, and he had been a personal friend of the magistrate. His murder forced the authorities to recognize how far the lawlessness of the past few weeks had gone, and they determined at last that it must be stopped. The police were reinforced from Portus Augusti and from Rome; a town crier was employed to warn the public that in the future illegal violence would be treated with the utmost severity; and people were asked to give information to the police whenever they saw a gathering of men which looked as though it might constitute a danger to the peace. After this the gangs came out only at night, and the number of casualties decreased at once.

A few days later, when it really seemed as though the weeks of danger, anxiety, and fear were over, it began to snow. The cold weather had lasted longer than any other cold spell in living memory. It began to snow at dusk on a

Saturday evening, and when Cedonius woke the next morning, the town was covered in a white even blanket of snow about an inch deep. Because it was a Sunday, Cedonius got up before it was light in order to get to Synadius' house for the Eucharist. He dressed quickly, and put on an old woolen cloak over his clothes before leaving the house. Fortunata and Gito, her husband, were leaving at the same time, and Cedonius walked with them. Gito's legs had got worse during the winter, and this worried both of them, for they usually got slightly better during the winter months, when he did less wading in the sea than in the summer. Now the man had difficulty in walking. They cut straight through the town to the beach, for it was safer to walk along the seashore, where they were less likely to meet other people. As they walked, it began to get light. The beach, usually as dirty as all the tideless Mediterranean beaches, was covered with snow, and small gull-gray waves crawled and lapped along the sand, eating away the snow at the water's edge, and making a dark line that stretched away as far as the eye could see. The snow was whiter than the frothy lilac crests of spume which topped the waves, and the noise of their breaking was the only sound in a still world. It was a clean, cold world, as palely blue as the underside of ice, and even the rotting and inflated carcass of a donkey was covered by a decent shroud, the sockets of its eyes, pecked clean by gulls, lined with a soft curve of new snow, as though they were caskets for pigeon's eggs. By the time that they reached Synadius' villa the sky was light, and the snow flushed like a magnolia petal.

There were about one hundred and thirty people there. Marcus was elsewhere, but two of the deacons had already

arrived. Cedonius wondered if anyone would notice the number of footsteps converging on Synadius' house in the snow. It might provide a triumph for those with their wits about them and a great scoop for the police. Until the snow melted, Synadius would be in danger of being asked awkward questions. But it was no good worrying about things of that sort, and Cedonius prepared himself.

Before beginning, he broke with custom and addressed the people. They stood and listened to him, silently and without expression, and Cedonius noticed how red their faces were from the cold air outside.

"We must thank God," he said, standing still and dropping his eyes until he looked down at a spot on the floor a few feet in front of him, "that there are signs the persecution of the past few weeks is ending; like all such things it has blunted itself on the rock of Christ's Church. We have escaped, and for this we must be thankful; but not all have been so fortunate. Some have been injured, and some have died; some have suffered, and some, perhaps, have avoided suffering by repeating words they were forced to say in terror and disgust. If there are such people among us, let him who is without sin cast the first stone. If they trust in the forgiveness of God, I do not believe that they will be disappointed. Apostasy is a sin, but Christ came to call sinners, not the righteous, to repentance. I do not know who dares to say that apostasy is a sin so different from all other sins that it puts the sinner outside the scope of God's love. I should not dare to say so myself. Of those who have suffered and those who have died it would be an impertinence for me to speak. They died in Christ. We must thank God. Let us pray."

He moved back to the table, and began the Eucharist. When it was finished he prayed for rather longer than usual. He did not know, of course, that it had been his last celebration.

Cedonius did not go straight home. There was a sick woman in a house at the other end of the town, and her son asked him to go to see her, so Cedonius went with him. The sun was up, and the snow was melting. As they walked, their feet left brown wet prints in the slush, and the roads were slippery. The quickest way to the woman's house lay through the center of the town, so Cedonius started in that direction; but the boy, who was nervous, wanted to make a detour round the town to avoid meeting people.

"And wouldn't it be better if we didn't walk together?" the boy said.

He was almost as tall as Cedonius, but his pink round face under a mop of curly brown hair looked as agitated as that of a worried puppy.

"We shall be all right, Milo," Cedonius replied, smiling at him, "but if you'd feel happier, you go round the other way, and I'll go this way."

Much relieved by the suggestion, the boy turned up the next street and went off at a great rate, his loose-limbed body looking like something in a puppet show, as his long gawky legs slithered about in the melting snow. Cedonius opened his cloak, for he was getting hot.

It was still early, and the streets were empty. As Cedonius walked, slabs of wet snow slid off the roofs of the houses, falling with a wet splashing sound onto the pave-

ments, and the air was filled with the sound of gurgling and dripping water. When he came to the fish market, he stopped for a moment to wipe the sweat from his neck with a handkerchief. The market was held in a large square, in the middle of which there stood a rather ugly fountain consisting of a bronze boy with the tail of a fish who blew water through a conch shell into a stone basin below. The square was empty, and the fountain was not playing. The pool at its foot was frozen and covered by snow, and a little blob of snow sat on the boy's head like a ridiculous little cap, while the conch shell looked like a cream puff that had overflowed. Cedonius put his handkerchief away and started across the square. When he had gone twenty yards, he saw that there were some people standing in the shadow of the fountain on its farther side. He had not noticed them before. As he approached, they moved out into the square and stood looking at him. There were five of them. Cedonius lowered his head, looking at the snow in front of him, and was annoyed with himself when he felt a slight tightening of his stomach and a little constriction of his throat. His feet crunched on the gravel beneath the melting snow, which was disappearing fast.

When he was almost level with them, the men moved out toward him and blocked his path. They were led by a man of about fifty with a heavy, red face mottled with a mass of little purple veins, as fine as the minute thread-like things that wriggle and squirm in the stagnant water of summer ponds. His chin was covered with gray bristles and there was a drop of water dangling from the end of his nose.

"You're in a hurry," the red-faced man said, standing in

front of Cedonius with his legs apart and his hands — in one of which he held a short iron bar — hanging by his sides. “You should take life more easily. You’ll wear yourself out.”

The other four were no more than youths. One of them laughed and jostled Cedonius, while another looked apprehensively over his shoulder at the empty square. Cedonius stood still, and said nothing. He was sweating, and his knees had begun to tremble a little, but his mind felt quite still and cool, with no fear in it. Indeed, it was so still that it might have been paralyzed, and when he tried to pray, he found that he could not do so. If he felt anything at all, it was curiosity to know what kind of past misery, injustice, and pain had been responsible for turning the red-faced man into what he had become. For men were not born into the world smelling as strongly of evil as this man smelled now.

The apprehensive youth said, “Get on with it. Someone might come,” and the older man moved a step nearer to Cedonius, thrusting his face toward him.

“You’re out a bit early, aren’t you?” he said.

“You are out early yourself,” Cedonius replied.

“Yes, I am,” the man said, and Cedonius noticed that his forehead, too, was beginning to sweat, “but I haven’t been doing anything I oughtn’t to do. What about you, brother? You haven’t been to one of those Christian murder parties, I suppose, have you?”

“No,” Cedonius replied. “I haven’t been to a murder party.”

“Then you’ll swear an oath against the Christians like a sensible fellow, will you?”

Cedonius realized that he could not possibly escape. The words of the oath he was asked to repeat would have been ridiculous if they had not included a few Christian expressions which in that context were made to sound blasphemous and disgusting. Cedonius stood in silence, looking at the ground.

"Come on, brother," the red-faced man said. "You'll swear, if you know what's good for you."

"Get on with it," the apprehensive youth said again, and looked over his shoulder nervously.

"No," Cedonius said quietly, looking up into the face opposite him. "I'm not going to swear."

"You're not, eh?" the man said, spitting a little with the force and temper of his speech. At the same time he brought his knee up in a kick to Cedonius' groin.

Cedonius fell almost at once under the blows of the five men who pressed in on him. They crowded and kicked and hit with the senseless violence and ugliness of lust. Two people who came into the square at that moment, seeing what was going on, shrank back into the shadow of a doorway, half horrified, half fascinated, and very much afraid. The affair did not take very long; in less than two minutes the men stopped kicking and stood back. The red-faced man's lips were trembling, and a little line of dribble was running down the bristles of his chin. He wiped it away with the back of his hand. Then he wiped his iron bar in the snow. It left a red mark.

"Come on!" the apprehensive youth said, and began to edge away across the square.

The others turned to follow him, and after a moment they broke into a run.

The couple who had hidden in the doorway walked slowly across the square toward the bundle of tattered and bloody rags lying in the melting snow. It was a dark bundle, and, in contrast, the blood on the snow was a surprisingly bright red. The roofs of the houses round the square continued to drip, and the snow still fell from them from time to time with a dull, slushy noise. As the snow on the surface of the square melted too, a few fish heads, a few decaying vegetable leaves, and a few scraps of sodden sack-
ing began to steam on the yellow gravel and to smell in the sun. Cedonius was dead.

Despite the earliness of the hour, a small crowd soon gathered round his body. Wisps of pity and anger, and the shreds of those God-given capacities for sympathy and compassion with which they had been born into the world stirred in the hearts and minds of some of the people in the crowd. They were surprised to find that the body of a Christian did not arouse in them the same hysterical fear and hatred as the abstract idea of a Christian had so often aroused. Instead, the sight of the broken flesh of the dead man lying in the melting snow amidst the rubbish and the refuse of the fish market bewildered them, and sank down into unsuspected depths of their beings. As they walked away, they could not erase the picture of the dead Christian from their minds. It lay there like a seed: a seed from which, in God's time, the love of God would grow and flower.

the mines of Sardinia — a sentence considered equivalent to slow death. But Cedonius did not die; rather, he lived at last. Through the example of the slave Rufus, the weakling he had despised and brought to ruin, and with the help of another prisoner who was a priest, he began to understand what it meant to be a Christian. And by his life, and finally his death, he communicated this understanding to others, so that dying he lived, and became “a seed from which, in God’s time, the love of God would grow and flower.”

Mr. Dunscomb’s first novel, *The Bond and the Free*, a story of the time of Christ, was a selection of the Family Reading Club, the *Christian Herald’s* Family Bookshelf, and the Catholic Family Book Club. Edward Wagenknecht, writing in the *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, said of it, “I love this book. In originality, in freshness, and in honesty, it seems to me head and shoulders above most of the early Christian novels we have had lately.”

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